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ANDRÉ MAUROIS

*These Poor Jews*¹

“*Y*ou must find a bed for her,” said M. Kahn to Dr. Rosenthal.

The doctor raised his arms and shrugged his shoulders. He wore horn-rimmed spectacles, which he took off and wiped when he was worried.

“I insist on a bed being found for her,” repeated M. Kahn, with all the aggressiveness of a shy man. “She was recommended to me by several friends. She’s dreadfully poor, and the baby is due in a few days.”

“It is against the rules of the nursing-home,” grumbled the doctor. “She is not Jewish.”

He removed his spectacles and wiped them.

“Who founded this nursing-home?” said M. Kahn. “Everything here has come out of my pocket—buildings, equipment, staff. . . . I can change the rules if I want to. . . . She is not Jewish, but she is in distress. That’s enough.”

“There are many women in distress,” said the doctor acidly, “but they aren’t princesses, and no rules are changed on *their* behalf. . . . I know this one all right. I’ve very good reason to know her. She is the daughter of General Atnikhov,

¹ Translated from the French by Hamish Miles.

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who was governor of the province at the time of the Kichinev pogroms. Her father allowed hundreds of Jews to be murdered without sending down a single policeman."

"All the more reason for showing charity to the daughter," said M. Kahn angrily. "We'll show her that Jews have hearts."

Dr. Rosenthal dropped his protests once Princess Baratinsky was under his charge. She was good-looking, sweet, and grateful. Revolution and exile had made her nervous. She had had to flee from Russia on horseback, riding behind her uncle. Her father had been killed. In Paris she kept alive for the first few months by selling her jewels, and then married Baratinsky, as poor as herself, and she found a poorly-paid job behind the counter in a small shop. At the worst possible time she found herself pregnant, and had it not been for this M. Kahn, to whom a friend recommended her, heaven alone knows what would have become of her.

"You'll allow me to scream, doctor, won't you?" she said. "When I'm in pain I like to scream."

Rosenthal smiled. She made him feel disarmed. Everybody in the nursing-home liked the little Princess. Her nurse, Mademoiselle Esther, knitted vests for the baby. M. Kahn sent her lilac and orchids. In the evenings Prince Baratinsky, who was a taxi-driver, came to see his wife and sat beside her bed. She leaned over and whispered fond and foolish things that made him laugh. Sometimes she would say thoughtfully: "You can't imagine, Peter, how nice they all are to me. . . . You know, when I think of the old days I'm seized with remorse. . . . How unjust we were to the Jews in Russia! My poor father . . ."

When her husband had left and she could not sleep, she would lay out cards on the coverlet and read her fortune.

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"Well, are the cards favourable?" asked Mademoiselle Esther brightly when she found her brooding over the outspread patterns.

But the little Princess shook her head. She believed in the cards.

* * *

The Julien Kahn Nursing-Home was a model of cleanliness, its white walls curved at every corner. Dr. Rosenthal, a zealot for antisepsis, was the perfect specialist, and accidents were rare, almost unheard-of.

"Our statistics are the best in Paris," M. Kahn used to say, rubbing his hands.

The little Princess's confinement was not an easy one, but she was in no danger. She screamed a lot and called for the chloroform, which Rosenthal refused to give her, as he belonged to the school of doctors which holds that pain has useful powers of its own. The baby was a boy, fair and pink, too large for so frail a mother.

Mademoiselle Esther was taken aback when, three days after the birth, the Princess's temperature jumped up. In the morning the thermometer showed 101°, and in the evening 105°. The patient was hot, and complained of pains in all her limbs.

"I don't like the look of it, doctor," said Mademoiselle Esther as they moved away from the bedside. "She has a bad history. . . . As soon as M. Kahn brought her here I felt frightened."

Rosenthal took off his spectacles, drew out his handkerchief, and began wiping the glasses.

"A bad history?" he said. "What? What could it possibly be? After all, it can't be an infection? Where could the germs have come from?"

Dr. Rosenthal was never to know where the little Princess

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had caught the germs of a puerperal infection, which was to gainsay him; but caught them she had, for the fever grew steadily worse. At first the patient made light of it. She spoke of nursing fever. And then the visible anxiety of her attendants caught her. She asked for her husband.

It was very difficult to get hold of the Prince, who was now doing night work to help his budget in these hard times. But at last he arrived, and sat down beside her. He was tall, with a shaven head, and that curious ease of bearing of a Guards officer. He had not delayed even to remove his taxi-driver's cap and overcoat, which he wore with a military air.

"What is the matter?" he asked Rosenthal impatiently. "Has she been looked after? You must do something. . . . Isn't there a serum?"

"There is a serum," said Rosenthal, anxious and annoyed. "I have given injections. They very often succeed, but in this case we've had no result. What else can one do?"

The little Princess was now in such a high fever that she recognised nobody. She twisted the sheets in her fingers and kept saying :

"The Knave of clubs . . . the Knave of clubs . . ."

Only once she looked at her husband, and said fondly :

"Peter, those poor Jews . . ."

In the evening M. Kahn himself arrived, escorted by the matron, Mademoiselle Samson, respectful and anxious.

"I've heard all about it," he said to Rosenthal sternly. "It is disgraceful. . . . In *my* nursing-home! The place for which I've given endless credits . . . disgraceful!"

Rosenthal wiped his glasses and made no reply.

"You must call in the leading obstetricians," said M. Kahn. "The best there are. . . . I *will* save this girl. . . . We'll save her, Prince," he added to her husband.

The doctor telephoned to one of his most distinguished

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masters, and the old man arrived bringing a friend with him. They approved of all Rosenthal had done, led Kahn aside, away from the husband, and told him that there was no hope.

About midnight, when they were all gathered round the little Princess's bed, a violent delirium set in. Raised up on the pillows, she screamed, her lovely face flushed with the fever, her hair dishevelled. Suddenly she stopped and seized her husband's hand as he stood there beside her. She leaned over to him.

"Do you see that, Peter?" she said to him in a whisper.
"All those Jews! They should be burnt!"

He tried to silence her, looking at the others apologetically. But on she went, earnest and ardent :

"Go and fetch my father—tell him everything. . . . My father is the governor. . . . Tell him to leave these Jews to the peasants. . . . Hang them on the trees along the roads. . . . Look at that one, Peter—with the spectacles! He must be killed! All the Jews must be killed!"

Her voice rose in a shrill agony. Kahn and Rosenthal and Mademoiselle Esther stood overwhelmed, in a circle round the dying woman's bed, their eyes filled with tears.

RUTH MANNING-SANDERS

The Game

It was eight o'clock on a frosty November evening; the night before there had been a heavy fall of snow, and the bare trees and furze-covered commons round Hookamere were white and sparkling in the moonlight.

Up the steep road that led out of the town and through the woods a carriage moved very slowly, the horse straining and slipping on the frosty ground. The driver sat motionless on the box, with his coat collar turned up and his bowler hat pulled down over his brow. He encouraged the horse with grunted monosyllables, but he did not attempt to get down from the box. The carriage jerked forward uneasily, as if after each troubled revolution of the wheels it must come to a standstill.

Mr. Jonathan Price, the passenger who sat under the protecting blackness of the hood, heard the stumbling of the horse, and wondered vaguely whether he should get out and walk. But as long as the broad back of the driver reared, pillar-like, in front of him, he concluded that all was well. Leaning back, wrapping the rug, which he wore as a cape, more tightly round his well-nourished body, he smiled contentedly, watching from behind his glasses the slow pro-

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cession of snow-crusted trees, with the yellow moon appearing and disappearing among them. It was a leisurely business, this travelling by horse carriage, but rather pleasant; also it was inevitable, since the only taxi in Hookamere had refused to venture because of the snow. The snow was a surprise to Jonathan; there had been none in town, and his wife had said nothing about it in her letter—though perhaps that was what she meant when she wrote that she would not definitely expect him home that night. It pleased him to think that he was returning when his wife did not expect him; the more especially because he had been sorely tempted to spend a joyous evening in town with friends—fascinating friends of whom his wife very definitely disapproved. He sighed thinking of those friends, and smiled again remembering his virtue. He might have stayed, of course, and his wife would never have known how he had spent the evening; on the other hand, he would probably have given himself away—he always did—so, to be strictly honest, his virtue was only discretion.

He pondered this while the carriage jerked onward to the top of the hill, to slide down another hill nearly as steep. Perhaps there was no such thing as virtue in these little problems, but only the silence of the prudent and the babbling of fools.

Uphill, downhill, from moonlit wood to moonlit moorland, the carriage creaked on its way, while the passenger pondered drowsily. He watched the moonlight brightening the hasp of the portmanteau, and the light from the little red disc of the lamp crimsoning the corner of the rug around his knees. He ruminated that in all the many domestic scenes due to his thoughtless transgressions it was of his blundering tongue, and not of the transgression itself, that he was ashamed. He disliked these scenes with his wife. They were undignified.

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Also they were ludicrous. They made him feel like a cow in a closed field being chased by a small bristling-haired terrier. He felt that he had done well to come home to-night. The life of a man should not be reduced to a sordid game played in a muddied field. The life of man should be tranquil, large, untroubled.

Mr. Jonathan Price reflected that he was by nature entirely suited to live a large tranquil and untroubled life. He was amiable, he was tolerant, he had a warm and susceptible nature, he bore no grudge and thought no evil, he liked to enjoy himself, he liked others to enjoy themselves—it was difficult to understand why his life was not always placid and enviable. All his little failings seemed to himself so understandable, so forgivable; indeed, one could scarcely call them failings. But Dorothea, his wife, did not understand him; he often told her so, and her answer was always the same—that she understood him too well. Though in reality she understood no more of the life of man than could be found in the parish magazine and expounded by the vicar. The vicar was her ideal man, and a church bazaar her earthly paradise. “A pity—what a pity!” thought Mr. Jonathan Price, blinking at the moonlit waste of snow and wishing he had stayed in town.

At the top of a hill, on a hedgeless level road, they passed a girl walking quickly and laden with two packages. Mr. Jonathan Price, with the moonlight shining on his glasses, peered round the edge of the hood after her grey, unsubstantial figure, and wondered who she was, where she was going and whether he should offer a lift.

Then the girl raised one of her packages and began to run after the carriage.

“Stop the horse,” said Jonathan Price.

The girl came up panting. “You going to the party?”

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"Unfortunately—no," said Jonathan Price, raising his hat and noting with distinct pleasure the girl's unconventional appearance.

"Bad luck! Then I'll have to walk," said the girl.

"Not necessarily," said Jonathan Price. "Where are you going?"

"To Badger's Cross."

"That's not much out of my way," said Jonathan gallantly, "if you would care——"

The girl stepped into the carriage, giving thanks in a quick, confident voice.

Mr. Jonathan Price began unwinding himself from the rugs.

"It's the guitar, you know," said the girl, "and my dress—they're so heavy. And I do think they ought to have met me, don't you?"

"I'm sure they ought, but, in fact—a pleasure," said Jonathan Price, delighted to have his solitary drive and his moody reflections both taken from him.

The carriage rattled on again. The girl chattered impulsively. Mr. Jonathan Price could not see her face under the protecting blackness of the hood, but he beamed at the crimson light that fell from the red disc of the lamp upon the rug that covered their knees. The crimson glow seemed to find an answering glow in Jonathan Price's heart, a glow that stained the cold white world through which he journeyed home, giving it a romantic and even a dream-like quality. He liked people who were instantly friendly, he was instantly friendly himself; it seemed the right and natural attitude between a man and his fellows. He smiled continually as he listened to the girl's rapid and spontaneous voice. She told him there was to be a fancy-dress dance at Badger's Cross.

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"Badger's Cross," ruminated Jonathan Price, "the—what's their names?"

"Yes, the Turpins," said the girl. "Know them?"

"Vaguely—heard about them, that is," said Jonathan Price.

"Ripping people!" said the girl, "painters—ever so kind and modern, you know."

"Yes, I know," said Jonathan Price. "I have something of the artistic temperament myself—worse luck."

He sighed. He did not really know the Turpins, because Dorothea, his wife, would not let him know them. She even described these ever so kind and modern people as "disgracefully fast."

"Why did you say that?" asked the girl.

"What?"

"Worse luck."

Jonathan Price was thinking of a suitable answer when the carriage, which had turned from the high road into a steep lane, gave such a lurch that he said nothing. The ice and the ruts in the lane were altogether too much for the patient little horse. His hoofs slid and clattered with a metallic sound. The wheels stuck, jerked and refused to revolve. The driver got down cursing and using his whip. The carriage tilted, jerked on again at an angle that sent the guitar-case and the suit-case and the portmanteau sliding on to Jonathan Price's knees. Then it stopped again.

The driver looked in under the hood, eclipsing the moon.

"Lane's a sheet of ice—can't do it."

"All right," said Jonathan amiably, "put us down here, we'll walk."

He stepped out stiffly, paid the driver, and with his portmanteau in one hand and the girl's suit-case in the other, stood, with the same good-tempered smile, watching the noisy

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mancœuvres of horse and man to turn the carriage. Then, with short, cautious steps, he accompanied the girl up the lane toward Badger's Cross.

Badger's Cross was an old farm-like building; it looked very festive with the snow glistening on its steep roof and every window warmly lighted. As they went up the short drive the sound of an energetic jazz band, loud laughter, fragments of song, and the shouting of many voices could be heard through the frosty air.

"Jolly," chuckled Jonathan Price, taking quicker steps.

He did not mean to go farther than the door, though the girl urged him to enter as confidently as if the house had been her own. Whilst he was hesitating, the front door was flung open, firelight and candlelight dazzled his spectacled eyes, louder music and merrier laughter delighted his ears, the smell of perfume and claret cup and cigarette smoke tickled his nostrils, and, weakly protesting, he was taken by the arm and led with hilarious cordiality into the hall. Motley figures flitted across the hall, a fire roared, through a wide doorway he could see a vista of fantastic couples dancing in a room hung with swaying balloons and coloured glass balls. Standing smiling and blinking through his spectacles, he was introduced to three young men, one in a black shirt and red trousers, one in a red shirt and black trousers, one with a liripoop and purple tights.

"Not stay?" expostulated black shirt.

"Why, my dear fellow—it's positively ridiculous," echoed red shirt.

"Fit you up with fancy in a jiffy," said purple tights.

"And, after all, why not?" thought Jonathan Price.

And so it happened that Jonathan Price, looking very chubby and a trifle foolish in a white shirt, a crimson sash, his own pyjama trousers and a black beret with dangling

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ostrich feather, made the acquaintance of all those "ever so kind and modern" people of whom Dorothea his wife so strenuously disapproved.

There, in and out of the big farm kitchen, hung with balloons and coloured glass balls, in which little figures revolved in minute and distorted perspective, Jonathan Price danced with whoever would dance, laughed with whoever would laugh, flirted with whoever would flirt, and drank with whoever would drink. And there, at two o'clock in the morning, sitting on the kitchen dresser with the ostrich feather dangling over his spectacles, he performed wildly and tunelessly on a bent tin whistle to the plaudits of the entire company. At four in the morning, in a state of complete happiness, arm in arm with red shirt and black shirt, and with purple tights leading the way across the yard and recklessly striking matches which sizzled in the falling snow, he set off for home. But home being difficult to find, and all paths appearing to lead the four friends hilariously back again to the door of the stable in the yard behind Badger's Cross, they finally made Mr. Jonathan Price a cosy bed in the fodder store, where, having covered him in hay to the chin and taken a vow of eternal friendship, they left him to repose.

"Splendid world—splendid fellows—instantly friendly," murmured Mr. Jonathan Price as he fell into a dreamless sleep—

Eight hours later, portmanteau in hand, he was walking with short self-conscious steps down the sunny, snow-covered lane to his own house. It was a morning on which everybody should feel happy, he thought. And so they might if only he could control his tripping tongue. He had to remember that he had caught the 9.30 from town and that he had walked from the station because it was such a beautiful, sunny

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morning—also that urgent business had prevented his coming home last night.

All these stalwart lies Jonathan Price rehearsed walking down the lane, crunching the new-fallen snow under his boots. He must speak with conviction, otherwise he was in for it—epithets, hysterics, storms of tears, a sleepless night, and words, words, beating upon his consciousness like little wooden mallets, until his brain felt paralysed. And, after all, what wrong had he done? None, provided Dorothea did not know. Curious thing that *knowing* should make so much difference.

This was very pleasant, this sparkle of sun on the snow, and the red-and-white roof of “Crowhill” showing above black-and-white branches. Adjusting his glasses and clearing his throat nervously, he stepped up the garden path and opened the front door.

“Hullo!” he called.

Dorothea came out of the dining-room. She looked cold, and when she was cold her nose was always too red, though at other times she was beautiful.

He kissed her fervently. “Why, how early you are!” she said, surprised.

“Yes,” said Jonathan, speaking quickly and with precision, “I caught the 9.30 from town and walked, it was such a beautiful morning.” He cleared his throat and looked at her fixedly. “Awfully glad to be home,” he added, in a voice that was too hearty.

Dorothea’s eyes suddenly narrowed. She helped him off with his coat. Then she noticed a piece of hay on his sleeve and some grass seeds in his hair. Jonathan Price began to move away.

Dorothea said casually. “Oh, by the by, did you meet Glazier?”

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He knew that casual voice, it boded him no good. That was the worst of Dorothea, she had such a suspicious nature. She ought to have been a detective. Women should not be so sharp, it destroyed their charm. Here he was suspected already, and he had said nothing. He drew himself up and spoke haughtily.

“Meet Glazier? Yes, of course.”

“What did he say?”

“Say—why, nothing in particular, just ‘Good morning’ and that sort of thing.” Jonathan walked with dignity into the dining-room and, sitting before the fire with his morning’s post, assumed an air of intense pre-occupation.

Dorothea followed him. He did not even glance at her, but he was conscious that she was pursing her lips.

“It’s curious that you should have met Glazier,” she remarked drily.

“Well, I did meet him,” answered Jonathan irritably. He opened another letter and began to read. Dorothea said nothing but stood waiting. Jonathan adjusted his spectacles, fidgeted and said suddenly, “What’s this about Glazier? Why are you making so much fuss about him?”

“It’s you that’s making the fuss,” said Dorothea. “I don’t believe you, that’s all.”

“Oh, that’s all?” Jonathan blustered. “Well, perhaps it wasn’t Glazier I met. How can I remember every one that I meet on a four-mile walk? Please consider that I am short-sighted. You’re trying to catch me, as usual. I believe you know I didn’t meet Glazier.” Jonathan’s voice was angry, but his heart was very sad.

Moonlight, candlelight, laughter, wine, foolishness, dancing, all the little joyousnesses of life, red shirt, black shirt, purple tights and splendid people—all these drew far away and became unreal again. Life resolved itself once more into a little

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muddy field, with himself a heavy-footed cow, careering, seeking escape through closed gates, and Dorothea the sharp-voiced terrier dog snapping at his heels. Let the cow use its horns, then. But that was not the nature of the cow. The nature of the cow was to career, seeking escape. Absurd, there was no escape; only a longer or shorter period of heavy-footed blundering, of bristling exultant pursuit, and then himself driven into a corner. After that would come confession, epithets, hysterics, storms of tears, a sleepless night, and words—words.

Once more the game had begun.

Strange Portent

WHEN Polly Deeming was thirteen she was still quite pleased to be called "Polly," or "Polly-girl," or even, peremptorily, "Hi-you-Polly" by Sam Trevelyan, her father's chief farm hand.

Sometimes she rode beside him proudly, though precariously, on the narrow seat of the dung-cart. Sometimes she hung about the yard and the stables and cowshed, following him as he went from one job to the next, carrying them all out with method and precision. And always she accepted the bull's-eyes, jujubes and occasional lollipops that he fished up for her from the depths of his crammed pockets.

During the long hot summer before her fourteenth birthday the different delicate strata that made up Polly's little-girl character underwent an inevitable process of change and development, a shifting and crumbling process, as if the molecules that built up the vital fleshy house for her young soul were now in perpetual uneasy motion. It was at that time that she acquired odd little tricks of behaviour. She curled her lips into a half-sneer when Mr. Deeming uttered some mild familiar witticism. She took to tossing her head half-defiantly, half-coquettishly at Mrs. Deeming whenever

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that quiet woman issued an instruction or a rebuke. She narrowed her eyes and smiled with abominable superciliousness if anyone committed some slight gaucherie or put themselves in the wrong.

She became intolerant, restive and nervous, her spontaneous sweet affections all overwhelmed by the disturbances and apprehensions of adolescence. And she worried about Sam.

"Dad, I do think Sam ought to stop calling me 'Polly-my-girl,'" she complained at dinner-time.

"Why so?" inquired Mr. Deeming blandly.

"Well, I'm too old; I'm fourteen, and he's only a common servant anyway—not anybody at all really—just a labourer," floundered Polly pettishly.

Mr. Deeming laid down his knife and fork. "What! Sam a common labourer?" he repeated ponderously. "Rubbish, my girl! Get these ideas out of your head as quick as you can. Sam's been with us a dozen years or more, hasn't he, Mother?" He turned to Mrs. Deeming, who nodded anxiously.

"Yes, dear, twelve or thirteen years; I don't quite remember."

"There now, my girl; that's almost as long as we've known you," said Mr. Deeming, benevolent but firm. "So let there be no more nonsense. Sam's a good chap, and you're nothing but a silly little girl, for all your airs and graces."

"But, Dad," Polly protested angrily. "It isn't fair, Dad. If he's been a servant all these years it just shows he's meant to be one. He's got no ambitions, he's just a labourer like I said, and he ought to call me 'Miss,' not just 'Polly.'"

She shook back the yellow lock of hair that fell over her

LORNA REA

white freckled forehead with an affected gesture that irritated her father and strengthened his resolution.

If her little pointed face had been pleading instead of wilful, her full under-lip pouting prettily instead of drawn in, her eyes appealing instead of sparkling with resentment, he might have yielded. Instead, he preserved a maddening silence, and went on eating his pudding.

“Dad,” Polly began sharply, but her mother interrupted her :

“Now, that’s enough, Polly dear. Get on with your dinner.”

And even when the angry child, disregarding her mother, burst out shrilly, “Dad, you might say something anyway,” Mr. Deeming only answered stolidly :

“I’ve said my say, Polly,” and then wiped his mouth deliberately, rose, and left the table.

A rush of tears blurred Polly’s eyes; she choked, and ran from the room over the fields to a cool little copse beyond, where she threw herself down and buried her face in the moss.

No one had ever been so humiliated, she decided, so stupidly ignored and laughed at and made a fool of. Her parents were stupid—just dull and stupid; they didn’t understand. It was all very well for them, they were old and fat and stodgy, but she was young and pretty. Her hair was gold. She had been chosen to play the part of the Sleeping Beauty when they had performed it the term before at the secondary school. All the girls thought she was pretty. Once even, one of the teachers had said to her “Hullo, Goldilocks !”

Undoubtedly these thoughts were enheartening, and presently Polly lifted her hot face from the ground and sat up, feeling superior—almost like a tolerant grown-up—about her parents. They didn’t know how exciting it was to be

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young and lovely. They had forgotten all they ever knew. They couldn't be expected to realise that of course Sam ought to begin calling her "Miss." And later, some day a few years hence, it would be not just a mumbled "Mm," but "Madam" as she stepped daintily through the yard with her husband on a visit to her old parents, picking up her skirts to avoid the mire and looking back at her shining car that awaited her in the lane. . . .

It was lovely to be young, to sit under the trees and dream and plan, and idly watch the small shadows that ran over the moss as the sun struck down through the beech leaves that were quivering in the light breeze.

But Polly was only fourteen, and she had been too wrought up to enjoy her dinner, so that before the hot afternoon was quenched by the cool of the evening hunger drove her home in search of bread and jam. She sauntered off across the big field to the house, sun-warmed and dishevelled; slim still, but ripening as unmistakably as the corn that was turning from greenish-yellow to full gold. As Sam saw her coming along towards him his mind was brimming with a strange medley of images, Biblical, primitive and earthy. They would never form themselves into articulate speech, but they seethed in his conscious mind. He looked at her strolling in the shadow of the hedge, and she was the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley. A rose and a lily. And like wheat and barley too, and young birch trees and all green springing things. And softer to touch than lamb's wool, and the clean smell of her clear young skin enough to drive the day's work from a man's mind, and set him dreaming of the long nights when he is free to hold against his own hard body another body, softer and more supple than his own.

But Sam's face when he straightened up to look at Polly and smile at her as a friend might showed nothing of this.

LORNA REA

Instead, his smile broadened as she came on him unexpectedly and gave a start of surprise that translated itself into a comical little skip and jump.

"You was dreaming, Polly," said Sam.

"No, I was not. I was thinking," Polly answered with dignity.

"Not much difference between the one and the other for you, Polly-girl. And now you're leaving school you'll have all the time you want for dreams and plays and fancies."

"That just reminds me, Sam. There was something I wanted to talk to you about," said Polly; and though she was conscious of an inward tremor, her voice was crisp and pungent. "Now that I'm leaving school for good it's more as if I was grown-up. Not quite grown-up, I mean," she amended hastily, as she saw the corners of Sam's mouth curve into a smile—"but more nearly so. And anyhow, I don't think you ought to go on calling me 'Polly' and 'my girl' like you do."

She stopped, abashed by some awkwardness in Sam's silent reception of her remarks. He made no answer, however, until she stole a look at him, noting that the smile had fled from his face, and that he was standing quite still staring at the earth, whose rich darkness at their feet turned in the distance into a purplish bloom. Quick to feel her eyes on him, Sam looked up and caught and held her fleeting glance.

"What do Dad and Mother say?" he asked.

Polly's impatient little toe stubbed a small hollow in the ground and then smoothed it over again before she answered. It was her turn to look downcast. She was angry. It was so like Sam to go straight to the point like that. And why did he say "Dad and Mother," instead of "your Dad and Mother" or even "Mr. and Mrs. Deeming," as he would have if he had been talking to a lady?

STRANGE PORTENT

Irritated by these reflections, "It's nothing to do with Dad and Mother," she answered, more crossly than she intended: "it's my business entirely; and I think you ought to stop doing it when I ask you to."

"Then what shall I call you, Polly?"

She fidgetted for a moment. "You ought to call me 'Miss Polly,'" she faltered; but exasperation, nervousness, and a sudden realisation that she was in the wrong swept over her, and two tears brimmed into her eyes and quickly spilled over.

"No, Polly, my dear," said Sam gently. "It isn't time for 'Miss' yet awhile. You've got notions in your head that it's all right for you to have at your age, but it wouldn't do for us to be giving in to them. The time'll come for that later on. Now don't you cry, Polly-girl. There's nothing wrong but growing pains. Don't you cry, my dear."

But the gentleness of his voice fell so heavily on that dull mysterious ache located somewhere behind Polly's narrow breast-bone that she burst into a storm of tears, thrust him away blindly with two maddened little hands, and darted off towards the farm.

Sam watched the small figure in the crumpled pink cotton frock rushing along by the hedge, and presently, with a tolerant shrug of his shoulders, bent over his work. He had been hurt for a moment, he remembered, but only for a moment. Growing pains, that was what it was. The young thing's life was stirring in her and troubling her. She was but a child in knowledge and experience, and her new woman's instincts didn't rest easily on her as yet. But there was plenty of time.

Sam's face held a warmth, a glow that came in part only from the blood running strongly under the skin. His dark untidy hair that looked so soft was crisp with vitality, and his

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eyes were quick and clear. He was just in his prime, twenty-eight years old, long past the lumpish, hobbledehoy stage, and still far from the knobbled, gnarled old age that comes too early to those whose outdoor work must be done heedless of rain and windy weather. There was nothing remarkable about Sam Trevelyan except perhaps that dreamy glow that radiated from his inward passion for Polly to his outward seeming. Even when she was out of sight, thoughts of her would bring colour to his cheeks and a sparkle to his eye; but not for another year, till she was turned fifteen, did he begin his slow and careful courting.

Polly had ripened. The bodices of her cotton frocks were tucked and gathered now, and yet did not conceal the roundness of the breasts beneath. The line of her thigh curved gently out from her waist and swelled out plumply at the hips, so that as she moved across the yard with a jaunty little swing, Sam's eyes clung to her. She had grown more tranquil too. Some days she sang as she went about the house carrying out the tasks allotted to her. Sometimes she was quiet, and her long, grey eyes took on a brooding, dreaming intensity, as if she looked along the life that lay ahead of her, looking from this moment now, this *now*, this present instant, to other moments of rapture, ecstasy, anguish, satisfaction that she must surely live through before that last moment of all when her yellow hair, her milky skin, her freckles, her hands—she stretched out her fingers murmuring “These hands : these hands that I’m looking at : that belong to me, and *are* me”—must turn to so much cold, untenanted clay.

The toss of her head, the shaking back of her yellow hair that at fourteen had been a tiresome trick, at fifteen translated itself into a gesture of pure enchantment. A sudden rush of good spirits, a leap of the heart, would lift Polly’s round chin, curve her full mouth into a smile, and narrow her glistening

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eyes; and the lock that fell over her brow would fly lightly back, as if each separate hair were informed with that same joyous physical freedom that emanated from her.

With Sam alone of all the intimate circle in which she lived Polly was constrained and wary.

When he brought her a box of chocolates adorned with a huge blue bow, her first exclamation of pleasure, the first greedy pounce of her hands on the blue ribbon, were quickly checked, and she thanked him in a few embarrassed almost resentful phrases: "It's awfully good of you, Sam—thank you very much—but you really shouldn't. I'd truly rather not." Equally embarrassed, but happily so, for he thought she was secretly impressed by the magnitude of his gift, Sam would mumble that nothing could be too good for her—nothing, in fact, was good enough. At that, the silence that fell between them was heavy; and it was with deep relief that Polly, who was herself incapable at these moments of inventing some simple excuse to get away, would hear him say: "Well, I'd best be getting along now." Sometimes, her eyes on the ground, she would see only Sam's feet in their heavy boots stepping resolutely away from her; the right foot, the left, right, left, then right again; and at that moment—never before the fifth step—she would find herself free from the miserable spell that bound her, and she would turn back to the house or hurry quickly across the yard. At other times, puzzled and vexed with herself, she would force herself to look up at Sam's face and smile and thank him, and then his glad answering smile would for an instant thaw the proud and icy splinter that lay in her heart, and her nervousness, her difficulties and uncertainties would be lulled.

She remembered the phrase Sam had used to her when she left school. "Growing pains," he had said, "There's nothing wrong but growing pains." Now she wondered if

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perhaps that was true. Certainly her back often ached, and sometimes it seemed as if her neck were tired of holding up her head, and she must let it drop on to her cupped hands. Sometimes all her body, that was in fact slender and tall, felt, instead, dense and sluggish and inert. Then in church sometimes, or sitting at table perhaps, unease would stir in her and she must cross her legs and uncross them, and press back her shoulder-blades as if seeking relief from the burden of her young thrusting breasts. These were growing pains surely; so far Sam was right. But there was more to be considered. There were these haunting day-dreams, this happy building up of castles in the air: castles so solidly defined against a distant timeless horizon that reality seemed more dim and wavering than them.

Love was to be a wonderful and royal thing for Polly Deeming, thought Polly Deeming.

No such simple courtship would do for her as Dad and Mother had enjoyed; but here her thoughts would flit distastefully away; for love, the sort of love that old people—even old nice people—still felt for each other, seemed grubby with use, and shabby. Like an old pair of shoes, the one valueless without the other. Love, for Polly Deeming, must be swift and dazzling; she could not just be boxed up in a little house or farm with some village lad she had always known, climbing a narrow staircase to a bedroom that she must share with him for ever, in sickness and in health; and to a big bed where she must bring forth children by him.

Shudderingly she clothed those naked realisations of the limitations of her life in a mantle of fancy and dreams, and thought of strange men with deep eyes looking into hers drawing her away from her familiar background, showing her another background of jewels and servants and luxury and excitement; perhaps across the sea, perhaps in some huge

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foreign city, until at last she forgot to ask herself where the strange man—as dark as she was fair; tall and commanding, every feature visible to her inner eye—was to come from; and why young Polly Deeming of Deeming's Farm should be so singled out and favoured.

Rapt away in these passionate vanities, Polly touched moments of ecstasy that made the intrusive hours of reality seem more harsh.

Meals became so keen a source of irritations as to torment her beforehand, infuriate her at the time, and leave an aftermath of restless misery. Her sickened fancy recoiled from the sight of her father's heaped-up plate of good meat and vegetables, from the hideous deliberation with which he chewed, from his invariable habit of leaning forward with an eager look and saying: “That looks good, Mother,” and later leaning back with a comfortable sigh and saying: “Well, I enjoyed that, Mother.”

He did. He enjoyed boiled beef and dumplings and stewed steak and what he called a “good roast o' beef,” and what he called a “nice leg o' mutton,” and he never noticed that Polly looked at him almost with hatred as he ate, though he sometimes commented disapprovingly on her finicky ways with her food. Mrs. Deeming, as tranquil outwardly as her husband, with false teeth that clicked on her fork, nevertheless was aware through her outer solid layers of flesh of the darting shafts of Polly's anger and dislike. Some subterranean recollection of a time when she too had felt like that—had not accepted circumstances as they were, but had wanted them all tricked out in rainbow colours—made her faintly vulnerable to Polly's miseries. If she had framed the thought in words, she would have assured herself comfortably that all girls have their moods and whims before they settle down, but that it was naughty of Polly to disturb Father; and the

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only results of her fumblingly sympathetic perceptions of Polly's occasional unhappiness was to strengthen her in her life-long attitude of protecting Father from worries and upholding his authority. That unassertive authority was, indeed, so absolute that Polly made no attempt in words to break through it. She simply suffered and disliked, and must need choke back her suffering and dislike. With Sam it was different. If he intercepted her—and she noticed that he turned up increasingly often where she happened to be—when she was in a happy mood, he was so remote from her system of dreams, so utterly negligible, so unreal in spite of the pressure of his physical virility, that she hardly felt the impact of his presence, and all unconsciously gave to him, in sweet words and looks, the reflex of her happiness, sharing thus with him the dangerous afterglow of her excursions into her envisaged future.

On these days Sam's love for her mounted headily, and his reinforced confidence and poise were hard put to to endure the rebuffs of those other days when Polly was miserably conscious of imprisonment in a dreary world from which she could see no escape. Then, in sudden little spiteful sallies that often made her ashamed even as she uttered them, she would shoot out at Sam the venom that threatened to suffocate her when she was confronted by her parents' absolute non-comprehension. Sam understood. He knew that she wanted to wound, and what most hurt him was that she did not care who she wounded. Simply she must release the accumulated misery that inhabited her small body by dealing out sharp strokes on the most convenient whipping-boy.

The winter months passed slowly at Deeming's Farm, and everyone longed for the first green prick of spring. Mr. Deeming, coming home in the early dark about five o'clock, would stand steaming by the fire, and grumble at the rheu-

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matic pains that gnawed at his neck and shoulders. Mrs. Deeming, busy with her usual jobs in the house, would often stop at one of the windows and look out over the mucky yard to the bare fields, and sometimes even her mildness was shot through with irritation as she listened to the bleating of distant sheep.

The nights seemed endless to Sam. All day as he trudged about his mind was occupied with the job on hand or the next job that must be done, but in the evening, when the cows were milked and fed and he had gone the last rounds with his lantern, he came back to his cottage, and, poking round the small bleak kitchen, felt his breast torn with the pains of hated solitude. If Polly were there, a warm, loving wife, to tend to the fire, and give him his tea, and smile at him, and later go to bed with him and lie beside him, feeling passion for his passion, and tenderness and love for all his dumb tenderness and love—if Polly were there life would be rounded off, and he would have his place in the world; every tree and root and beast and flower would have its meaning. Without Polly, if the light, young, lovely girl never turned into that rich and comfortable creature, a wife, then the world held nothing for Sam. And he sat beside the fire in the evening and thought that now Polly had turned seventeen there was nothing to hold him back. He would speak to her in the spring; after Easter would be the time. He didn't want to rush her, but she must surely have known his feelings for a long time now, and though sometimes she was sharp with him, at other times she was kind enough, and in Sam's philosophy it was natural for all young things to play fast and loose like the calves that curvet and gambol at the farthest extent of their tether, pretending not to notice the rope that holds them fast.

But when he spoke to her at Easter she laughed and threw

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back her head and answered his serious words with a quick evasive, "Don't *tease* me, Sam."

"No, Polly, my dear. I'm not teasing you. It's no game to me. You're near eighteen now; not too young to be thinking of settling down in a while. Will you take a ring from me, dear, and let me court you proper? And maybe this time next year I'll get the cottage done over and you'll come to me in it."

Polly pouted.

"Oh, Sam, don't be so serious," she said. "It's silly to make plans. I shan't marry anyone for years, and when I do it'll be a grand gentleman with a big house and a motor-car, and I'll wear a silk dress in the evenings."

Even to herself her dreams sounded so silly put into words that she laughed again, half-shamed, and gave Sam's arm a quick pat before she darted off. He stared at his sleeve. Foolishness, more girl's foolishness. And yet this was surely the time for sober sense. He had been patient. He had waited three years and more. There were girls in the village no older than Polly, married, and with babies in their arms. Sam's lips closed grimly and his brows were drawn down in a scowl as he drove his spade into the wet steaminess of the dung-heap.

Polly was shiftless, he decided; she meant no ill, but she must learn. The time had come for steadier ways, for some settled declaration of her feelings and an open acceptance of his. He straightened his tall body, conscious of its needs and its strength, though unconscious of the beauty of his round brown neck, wide well-muscled shoulders, thin belly and sturdy legs. The time had come, indeed, for some earnest of future joys to be given to that body. He was resolved in the next few months so to hem Polly about, to shelter and encircle her with his love and the urgency of his

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passion, that her flutterings must cease, and she would find herself—like some unruly young animal—cornered, but at the same time unsubdued, and happily acquiescent.

Throughout that May and June Sam pursued Polly doggedly. It seemed to Polly that wherever she went—on some errand for her mother, or to the dairy to fetch herself a cupful of milk, or when she wandered in the fields, or sat in the woods, or even stood by the sink at the scullery window washing the thick white rose-sprigged plates after breakfast and dinner—sooner or later a shadow would fall across hers; or perhaps only a faint but richly-provoking smell of stables, cowshed, earth, or warm hay mingling with the air she breathed warned her that Sam was near her, beside or behind her; and then, irritably conscious of his presence, she would not look up nor speak, but kept her eyes sullenly fastened to the ground.

Occasionally resentment broke through her sulkiness and she would ask sharply: “What is it, Sam? What do you want now? Why do you come pestering me at my work?” Or, if she had been resting contentedly when he interrupted her, she would complain bitterly: “Can’t you even leave me alone when I am enjoying a little peace for once in a while?”

In the early summer Sam pleaded with her again and again: “Polly, dear, will you have me? Will you take me some day to be your husband and love you true? I have loved you four years now, my sweetheart, and all the years you were a little girl as well. Will you have me, my dear? I’ll love you for ever if you’ll but say ‘yes.’”

But he met with little response, and gradually, as the weather grew hot and the hot nights made sleep difficult, he grew more silent, still following Polly about with hopeful looks, but seldom urging his suit in words.

And now as Sam grew grim and speechless, Polly became

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ever more voluble; and her nervous irritability increased so that as soon as she knew Sam was near her she felt passionately indignant and burst out with hurried protests and complaints.

By August the earth was crumbling and dusty in the intense heat of an unusually dry summer. Here and there great cracks appeared in the ground, and the grass lost all its sappy green and withered and dried. The limp petals of poppies dropped almost as they opened, and the brightness of a nearby field fiercely blooming with mustard made Polly's eyes ache.

Mr. Deeming, working eighteen hours a day to keep the beasts going, and bring in the best and earliest harvest he had known for years, was tired too, but exhilarated by the richness of the summer's yield. Mrs. Deeming, unaffected by such inevitable constancies as heat and cold, the too-long darkness of winter, the too-bright nights of summer, went placidly about her business with no diminution of effort.

By Friday, as a rule, her recurrent weekly household tasks were done: the linen washed, ironed and put away on orderly shelves, each room thoroughly turned out on its accustomed day, and the store cupboard replenished with jam, bottled fruits, pickles and country wines according to whatever seasonable materials came to her ready hands. On Fridays, therefore, sometimes in the morning and always after the mid-day dinner had been cleared away, it was Mrs. Deeming's housewifely habit to spend a few hours on some special task and to enlist Polly's help in its performance.

The last Friday in August was preceded by five days of unwavering heat and five sultry nights, when even the breeze that sprang up under the moon was too weak to be refreshing. Sam was pale under his summer tan. Mr. Deeming was flushed and perspiring from breakfast till bed-time. Polly's fatigue made her face look smaller, and her eyes in consequence

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enormous; the large dark pupils, the circle of grey iris so shining and lucid, and the white eyeballs delicately veined with blue, seeming to dominate the small pale oval of brow, cheeks and chin. Even the cows lowed distressingly and held up their milk, till, out of all patience with their perversity, the milkers sharply slapped their flanks, and the pleasant somnolence of the cowshed, usually broken by the rhythmic hiss of the milk spurting into the pails, was jarred by peevish admonitions. "Git over now you, Daisy; you lousy bit of muck!" Only Mrs. Deeming, on this Friday, as on any other, dressed in her white cotton blouse and alpaca apron, seemed fresh and tranquil and fully prepared to carry out her usual routine.

"We'll do the glass and china cupboard this afternoon, Polly," she announced in the morning. "I've been meaning to paper the shelves and hang a bit of fresh wall-paper at the back of the cupboard for two or three weeks now. And there's some of the china hasn't been taken out and dusted for I don't know how long."

"Oh, Mother, we really can't do it to-day," Polly said querulously.

"Why ever not?" Mrs. Deeming appeared genuinely surprised. "It's the very day for it; I've nothing else on hand, and, as I told you, it's been asking for a good turn out for a long time."

"But it's so hot, Mother; so frightfully, horribly hot."

"Nonsense, child. Don't think about it and you won't feel it. A young thing like you, with no worries and little work, and wearing no more than your cotton chemise and drawers and dress, should be ashamed to grumble at the sunshine."

Her voice was good-humoured, but when Polly went on wearily, "Why must it be to-day? Why can't we do it

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to-morrow or the next day, or the next, or the next?" she answered briefly, "To-morrow I've got my baking to do and the fruit pies and all. The next day's Sunday, when we'll all go to church and rest, and next week'll bring its own work. So no more nonsense, Polly; we must get a start made before dinner, then put in a good afternoon at it."

Mrs. Deeming's hands were fat, the knuckles swollen with rheumatism and the skin rough with work, but they cut the strips of paper intended for the back wall between each shelf more neatly than Polly's small fingers. By three o'clock an old roll of wall-paper with a smooth satiny white stripe running side by side with a rough white stripe, and sprawling red chrysanthemums adorning it in regular clumps, had been fetched down from the attic, and Polly and Mrs. Deeming had drawn a table close to the cupboard and arranged on it all the glass and china that must be washed and dusted.

Now Mrs. Deeming was instructing Polly in the proper way to line the walls.

"Anyone would think you'd never seen it done before," she said, smiling at Polly. "Your fingers are all thumbs, child. Look! Do it like this. Measure the length of wall, then put a little mark on the paper where you want to cut it, and then cut along the stripe; that'll keep you straight."

But though Polly did as she was told, she cut the strip too long, and then, in shortening it, cut off too much, so that it was now a few inches too short.

Mrs. Deeming sighed and pursed her lips.

"It doesn't matter, Mother," Polly impatiently answered the unspoken criticism. "It doesn't make any difference whether we leave a little bit there or not. Or, if you like, I'll cut another tiny bit and stick it over that to fill in the gap," she offered.

But Mrs. Deeming, standing back to look at their joint

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handiwork, felt pleasure at the sight of her own strip, cut so exactly and pasted to the wall with such care and economy that it stuck there without a join or wrinkle.

"No, Polly, it won't do. If a thing's worth doing it's worth doing well." And the rebellious girl was obliged to repeat the wearisome process of measuring, marking and cutting.

"It's ugly," she said listlessly—"so hideously ugly."

"What is, Polly?" Mrs. Deeming asked curiously.

"That awful wall-paper."

"But it's Father's and my bedroom paper," Mrs. Deeming cried. "We chose it ourselves only two years ago! It's beautifully bright and fresh, it cost two and sixpence the piece."

"It's hideous and gaudy," Polly retorted coldly.

Mrs. Deeming looked indignantly at Polly, and then at the insulted paper. The chrysanthemums seemed brighter but less fresh and beautiful in the light of her daughter's comment, and outraged pride made the mother's fingers itch to box the daughter's ears. But Polly sighed, and Mrs. Deeming, looking kindly at her peevish, pale face, sighed in company, and said, "You're a difficult girl, Polly. Nothing's ever good enough for you. I'm sure I don't know what you want to satisfy you."

"I don't know myself," Polly answered in a low voice, and for a moment the two women stood silent looking at each other with puzzled eyes.

A window was open on the landing beside them, and a hundred small sounds—the little humming noises, the buzz and fuss of busy insects—penetrated to their ears, making the girl long for the outside world, for the lazy, cool woods where the moss still kept its moist greenness; but reminding the mother of the immediacy of life and the necessity of finishing the cupboard before tea.

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"Good gracious, we mustn't dawdle," she said briskly; "come along, Polly, this won't do. We're losing precious time. Quickly, now; we'll polish all these glasses with our clean cloths before we pick out the bits of china that need washing."

She set to work, polished the first batch of tumblers, and replaced them on the shelf, chatting pleasantly meanwhile.

"These are funny old glasses, aren't they, dear? They belonged to Aunt Susan, and she got them from Great-Aunt Susan, of course; and then Aunt Susan never married, so I came in for them. The pattern's nice, I must say, but they're a bit heavy for ordinary use, and I wouldn't like them broken either."

Something in the quality of Polly's silence arrested her attention. She turned quickly.

Polly, her cloth in her right hand, was standing rigid, staring down at the glass she held, the fellow of those that Mrs. Deeming had been speaking of, the first of the half dozen.

Mrs. Deeming's glance fell on the tumbler, which appeared to have nothing remarkable about it, except for the fact that Polly was gazing moonily at it, and every vestige of colour had left the girl's cheeks. Even her lips were bloodless, and her body was still held stiffly erect, as if she were withdrawing in horror and anguish from the simple object in her hand. Mrs. Deeming was frightened by her looks. "Polly!" she said, and was alarmed to hear her own voice sounding no louder than a whisper. "What is it, Polly? What's wrong, dear?"

And then, more frightened still, she gently shook the girl by the arm. "What is it, my dear? Tell me at once! Are you ill?"

She felt a single shudder run through the arm that she held,

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and then Polly's eyelids lifted, and her clear pale eyes locked with her mother's gaze. "That's the tumbler," she said confusedly, "the one that will be stained by the smoke from Sam's gun. I mean it's stained now, by the smoke that comes later."

"Polly!" cried Mrs. Deeming, now so much alarmed that her voice resounded angrily, and the faintest trace of colour again stained Polly's lips. "Waken up at once; you're dreaming, child—waken up quickly. Polly, are you listening to me, child?" She shook the girl more vigorously, and suddenly Polly set down the glass and rubbed her eyes with her hands.

"Oh, Mother! What a queer awful thing to happen," she began, her words pouring out in a nervous torrent. "I don't understand. It was like seeing something that was going to happen, but hadn't happened yet. I don't know what I mean. Why should I think Sam would shoot himself? He won't, will he? Mother, promise me he won't. I'm frightened."

But as Polly rattled on frenziedly, Mrs. Deeming's own fears merged into relief and indignation. There had certainly been something queer, she told herself, about that first moment when she had seen Polly staring like a lunatic at one of Aunt Susan's tumblers. But now here was the girl jabbering a lot of silly rubbish. More fads and fancies; more of this trying to make herself out different from everybody else; and if she couldn't do it in the one way, well, she'd try another. That was all there was to it, Mrs. Deeming rather incoherently tried to convince herself, and proceeded to scold Polly severely.

"All your silly dreams and your idleness are more than I can bear. And you're no help to me at all; what's worse, you're a real hindrance, Polly!" But even as she railed on

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robustly, she could not help noticing that Polly's face above the lilac cotton frock had a queer sick look; quite washed-out and nervous the child looked. Lilac was a difficult colour, of course. Polly had been set on just that queer shade—"mauvish blue," she had called it—but now, with shadows that matched it ringing her eyes, and hardly any colour in her cheeks, the girl didn't look herself at all. Mrs. Deeming's scolding ended abruptly.

"Run away outside for a while before tea," she said kindly. "Lie quiet under a tree—I'll easily finish the cupboard myself, and I'd like you to get out in the air, dear."

"Mother, please leave that tumbler," Polly whispered. "Please don't touch it. I must speak to Dad. I must make him and you understand. I'll speak to him after supper, and it'll be easier if I could have the tumbler to show him. *I must* explain to you both. I'm frightened now."

"Oh, dear me, what next?" said Mrs. Deeming uneasily. "There's no need to worry Father for nothing. But if you're so set on it, I won't rub the glass till you've shown it to him, though there's nothing queer about it that I can see."

Thankfully Polly slipped downstairs and, snatching up a shady hat, made off across the yard towards the field leading to her favourite little copse. Through the open barn door Sam saw her coming, and as she drew near he suddenly stepped out from the musty darkness and confronted her. She gave a quick high scream, and turned so white that he thought she was going to faint, and put his arm round her to steady her. She struggled furiously for a second; then he freed her; and shrinking away from him, crouching a little, and almost spitting out her words in an agony of fright, she said cruelly:

"Get away from me, Sam. I *loathe* you. You're so hot. I can't bear you. You smell like one of the beasts!"

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Sam's hands dropped to his sides. He looked at her with dark anger brooding in his eyes and sullen hate twisting his mouth.

"Yes, I'm hot," he said slowly and bitterly, "I'm hot because I'm a man and I work for my living. And I smell of the beasts because I work with them. But you don't work. You're no use. You're an idle, finicky good-for-nothing; you're a spoilt, dreaming slut. And I'm through with you."

"Oh!" said Polly. "Oh, Sam!" And her voice was pleading.

But Sam was heavy with anger and he turned from her.

A kitten, one of the many little parasites that haunt a farm, scampered out from the barn. Sam's big foot swung out, caught it, and kicked it across the yard. Wounded and terrified, it limped away, as Polly, herself like an infuriated spitting kitten, sprang at Sam, seized his hand, and bit it till her sharp teeth drew blood, while her finger-nails tore down his cheek in five scarlet streaks.

Then she stood back.

"And I'm done with you," she said very gently. "I'll never speak to you again. I wish you were dead, Sam. You're too horrible to live."

Her voice held a new note of conviction, a mature certainty. Sam's eyes were desperate as he gazed at her, knowing that she meant what she had said, that he had indeed lost her, and with her everything that mattered in life. She looked at him no longer, but ran with thudding heart and racing, agonised thoughts across the yard, across the three-acre field, with the hot smell of withering red sanfoin teasing her nostrils, till at last she found shelter in her accustomed little copse, where the yellowed moss still held a faint reserve of green.

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The sky darkened as the day wore on. Heavy purplish clouds hung low over the tired fields and a queer lucidity invaded the landscape, so that on the trees each separate branch and twig stood sharply etched in the clear air.

Later, at sunset, the leaves rustled, and the slightest perceptible movement stirred across a field of full-eared corn.

Mr. Deeming raised his head, eyed the heavens apprehensively, and shook his head, confident of rain, but fearing a storm. Farming was all like that, he thought philosophically as he trudged home, always too much or too little. To-night was going to be a good bit too much by the look of it.

Mrs. Deeming, sitting contentedly in her rocking-chair, greeted him placidly : "Supper's ready, Father. I was just waiting for you."

"Right. I'm ready now. There's a storm coming up. It'll be on us soon. Where's Polly?"

"She's out still. But she'll be back any time now. It's cooler, isn't it?"

All through the evening Polly had slept under the trees. The tangle of her fears and worries and misery had yielded to drowsiness, and when she was awakened at last by big drops of rain falling coolly on her face she was listless and emptied of emotion.

She sat upright, then, realising that unless she hurried she would soon be drenched, she ran home across the fields and burst into the kitchen with wet drops sparkling in her hair. Mr. and Mrs. Deeming were at supper. The red-and-white checked table-cloth that covered the table was clean and bright. The rose-sprigged china was pretty. A fresh salad in a glass bowl looked tempting.

Polly's spirits rose suddenly. It all looked so homely and safe and comfortable. She even smiled at her father when

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he said kindly, "Well, here's our Polly at last; and high time too. Young things need food; they can't live on air."

But her heart sank again suddenly, and she quickly asked her mother, "Where did you put that tumbler, Mother? You didn't wash it, did you? I must show it to Dad."

"No, dear, I didn't wash it. It's on the window-sill in the scullery above the sink. But you're to eat now, Polly. Come along, dear. You can talk later."

She was soothing and commanding at once, and Polly was mechanically eating her supper, and feeling the better for it, when the first clap of thunder rumbled across the expectant stillness. Rain poured down in torrents, but the lightning that flickered round the room between each clap was sinister, gleaming now on a brass ornament on the mantelpiece, now on a stretch of patterned wall-paper, so that as yet there was no great relief from the previous tension, although the moist air grew cooler.

Polly shivered. "I hate storms, Dad," she said.

"We need this one, my dear, though I doubt but what we'll get too much of it."

"We need *rain*," Polly objected, "and goodness knows I'm thankful it's come, but it's storms that I hate. All this noise and the horrible lightning."

Mr. Deeming smiled at her, but made no answer. He often thought about Polly, loving her yellow hair and shining grey eyes, her lips and cheeks and long neck, puzzling over her whimsies, her airs and graces, turning a speculative eye from the solid bulk of his wife's body to the fragile, light-boned creature that had been born of it, and pondering on the mystery of sweet, untried youth.

A louder clap than the others was followed by the sound of a sharp explosion close at hand.

LORNA REA

Mr. Deeming sat up. "What was that?" he asked himself aloud. "It sounded like a gun, out at the back."

He waited for a few moments, then got up, walked calmly through to the scullery and opened the back door. Immediately, with an exclamation of horror, he started back.

Polly, ashen pale, had followed him; as he stepped back involuntarily, she saw what he had seen first.

On the step, sprawling and crumpled, lay Sam, one arm under him, the other flung out over the barrel of his gun.

The rain streamed down on his wet black hair, on his still body, on the blood that was dripping slowly off the step.

Polly screamed, and screamed again—a high, thin scream that brought Mrs. Deeming hurrying to her side. The girl, burying her face in that comfortable bosom, hiding her eyes, crying and shivering, was the mother's first concern.

Sam's shattered body had been carried to his cottage, and Mr. Deeming, sad and confused, was sitting once again in the kitchen holding his head in his hands, suffering over the tragedy that had so suddenly broken across his quiet life, when Mrs. Deeming came down from Polly's bedroom. Polly had clung to her at first, babbling wildly, sobbing wildly. Now she was at least lying quiet, and her mother felt free to leave her.

With hands tightly clenched, Polly lay rigidly on her back, with only one thought dragging through her mind : I killed Sam; I killed him with what I said to him. I killed Sam.

The thunder died away at last with a few threatening murmurs; and at last Polly remembered the smoke-stained tumbler and sat bolt upright. It was late, and the house was dark and silent. She lit a candle and crept softly downstairs to the scullery. The window, that had been open earlier, was shut now for the night, but on the sill was Great-Aunt

STRANGE PORTENT

Susan's tumbler, smeared and blackened as Polly had seen it in the afternoon.

She touched it very gently with one finger, and in the candlelight saw that her finger was now lightly smudged.

A wave of purest relief now flooded her heart. She hadn't killed Sam. It had been meant, arranged beforehand. It wasn't what she had said, it was all part of a pattern. She didn't understand; everything was confused and muddled; but it had been planned. It wasn't just her cruel words that had killed him: it had been decided before.

She crept upstairs again, and leaned out of the window tasting the air that had grown so cool and sweet, crying softly for poor Sam, until at last, tired out, she lay down sadly, thinking with a last little spurt of tears just before she fell asleep: Poor Sam! When I was a little girl I loved him.

*Spring Idyll in Sardinia*¹

THE April night was unexpectedly warm after a long, cruel winter that seemed never to weary of tormenting the earth with its rigors. But the winter was over at last, and the earth slept peacefully—the sleep of spring, pregnant with her eternal renewing. In the stillness of the night the leaves were uncurling themselves furtively on the trees, and the little flowers in the fields were beginning to open their eyes and peer at the mystery of the stars. The horizon was shrouded in a misty light, as though a fire hidden there, burning fragrant wood, were giving all its warmth and perfume to the night. The moon was rising.

* * *

Even the sheep-dog was asleep, stretched out like a pad of pale plush across the threshold of the sheep-fold. And the herdsman in his hut slept too, taking advantage of the absence of his master, who had gone to the village to get married. He had more faith in the dog than in himself, for since the dog, who was young and powerful and swift, had guarded the fold, nothing untoward had befallen it. And indeed while the man was wrapped in a deep opaque

¹ Translated from the Italian by Hilda Bonavia.

SPRING IDYLL IN SARDINIA

slumber the dog's sleep was transparent; it was light and fitful. The dog seemed to know he was the beasts' sole guardian, and to feel the responsibility. But all his instincts responded to the influence of the warm spring night, and from time to time a tremor made his spine quiver beneath the skin, as though a breath of wind had ruffled the surface. He whined in his sleep, for his dreams were filled with sensations of great sweetness and strange desires—the desires of adolescence. He was scarcely more than a puppy, and had not yet mated.

* * *

But the two foxes—the dog and vixen in that labyrinth of shrub-covered rocks in which they roamed—could not sleep. They were hungry, driven to desperation by many days of wet weather and scarcity of food, and the emptiness of their bellies sharpened their wits.

Besides, the fox felt the change in the weather and that his chance had come. And being well endowed by nature with wit and cunning to take advantage of opportunity, he trotted out into the open. He was small and black, with a tail both longer and thicker than his body. His eyes shone like stars. The vixen was bigger, light in colour and smooth in texture, and although her body was very long, she could make herself as small as a marten in her earth.

She followed the fox without any precise intentions, but imitating his way of moving, placing her hind paws into the prints made by her fore-paws, so that if her tail did not obliterate the prints completely they would look like those made by a bird. The two came at last to the bank of a little stream at the bottom of a slope, and stopped to listen to the noises of the night. The water, swollen by the recent rain, flowed here and there among the rushes on either bank with little grumbling protests. There was a strong smell of mint.

GRAZIA DELEDDA

The fox drank, not because he was thirsty, but to feel the water cool against his snout. Then he turned round and, moving backwards, began to swish his tail about in the stream until it was thoroughly wet, just as women do when they wash their long hair.

The vixen knew what was expected of her, so when he continued on his way up the slope and across the meadows of the upland, she followed him, being careful to sweep the ground with her dry tail. Everything was in their favour. The fox stopped when they reached the edge of the pasture where the sheep-fold stood. The vixen stopped too, and both waited and listened. Not the slightest sound broke the stillness of the night. Even the stars seemed motionless, as though enchanted. The earth gave out a secret smell of vegetation, a mixed scent of young fresh grass and straw, of violets and kingcups. Even the vixen smelt of wild mint.

* . * *

She had her own plans. Leaving the fox still standing motionless beneath a briar, she hurled herself forward with prodigious speed. She was drunk with the joy of her own youth and strength and speed. Her only desire was to play and frolic; she had forgotten her hunger and was joyful. And because she had no thought of theft, but only of enjoyment, and hoped to find a playmate less famished and predatory than her mate, she approached the sheepfold with all the assurance of a friend of the family.

* . * *

The dog recognised her and her intentions; and so he did not bark, but rose quickly to his feet. He ran out to meet her, and caught her by the neck, but without hurting her. She turned suddenly and bit him on the ear, a little harder than he had bitten her. The dog shuddered

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as though he had been stung, and then little shivers of pleasure ran all along his spine. He felt the same mad desire for play; he longed to throw off his slavery to man and his responsibility for the safety of the beasts, and to escape from the dull emptiness of his life. He released the vixen, only to catch her again; he threw her on the ground and bit her rapturously till she bled. Suddenly she broke away and fled, hiding herself in the darkness. But the dog saw her as she sped across the grass, and pursued her, mad with pleasure. The vixen waited for him where the rising moon threw a line of silver across the field; below the dark blue of the hollow might have been a river. She turned to meet him, and tried to jump on him. The dog leapt up, and so did she, and they seemed to embrace each other. Then they threw themselves on the ground together and began to roll over on the edge of the slope, engaged in a game that was both fierce and tender.

* * *

The fox in the meantime had found his way right into the heart of the enclosure. The sleeping sheep, fat and snug in their warm fleece, he left in peace, his objective was the new-born pigs, who were with the sow in one corner. The mother tried to defend them, but the fox shook his wet muddy tail right in her eyes, and she fell back blinded. Then that cruel enemy took out the little pigs, the steel points of his teeth buried in their necks, and one by one he carried five away, first to the edge of the meadow, and then lower down right to his hiding-place among the rocks. And there, all alone, without further ado, he began the feast. When the vixen arrived later on, panting from her play, she devoured a whole pig, chewing the tender skin as though it were a bit of orange peel.

* * *

GRAZIA DELEDDA

At dawn the herdsman noticed that the piglings were missing, but he was not upset nor conscience-stricken. But seeing that the dog had not barked, and was still fast asleep, as though he had done nothing but his plain duty all night, he said to himself, "Poor beast! the thieves must have tied your tongue. They bewitched you with magic words. No fault of yours, and no fault of mine. And the master will have nothing to say, for he too has been bewitched by the magic words of a woman. And tied up properly for the rest of his life."

And he bowed, submissive and unconsciously ironical before the power of the inevitable.

But one day some time later, while exploring the surrounding country, he came to the foxes' lair. And in a clearing he saw two graceful puppies playing happily together, running round each other in circles and pretending to bite. They made no attempt to escape, but looked at him as if they knew him. They were two magnificent puppies of that cross-breed which even a fox cannot outwit and which is best able to hunt him down.

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Gemini

I NEVER looked upon Raddock village save in darkness, and though I suppose there must have been periods when the sun lifted shamelessly upon its severely utilitarian avenues and gardens—a quite naked exposure, in fact—to me there was always a quality of the mine about the experience. An element in darkness quite difficult to explain.

. . . *Dusk deepened in a fold behind Catbells, the shoulder of the mountain lifting to the clear light of stars. On a ribbon of high road beyond the poplars, a lamp glimmered, and was quenched as in the act of signalling. A moment later, it ran diminutive on the road to Keswick. A beck beyond the garden wall burbled faintly, contending with the grey stone piers of the tiny bridge. Above the arbour, leaves were perfectly still. Within its shelter a cigarette tip wavered uncertainly, waxing, waning, to a conclusion. . . .*

You see, my contact with the village was only in the course of certain winter evenings, and darkness had always fallen when I approached the Community Hall in which I lectured. This building had a certain individual character too. You took a circuitous pathway, entering a tall, leafy avenue, the branches almost interlacing, and walked with difficulty to a point where an incandescent lamp indicated the doorway.

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Within that tenuous winding, the noise of the main road was stifled, and the many leaves—there were aspens in the plantation, I remember—whispered and fluttered like so many live things. When you did raise your eyes overhead, it was to brief channels of night sky that served only to accentuate the general mugginess beneath. Another element of darkness.

Originally the building had been used as a stables, and but little money had been laid out in making it a diminutive public hall. The old standings had been taken down, the walls drably toned, and a number of travel posters introduced to make an encouraging splash of colour. There was one poster, I remember, setting out the luscious seduction of Bournemouth, a watering-place as effectively beyond the purview of the ordinary inhabitant of the South Yorkshire Coalfield as the Islands of the Blest! In spite of these courageous innovations, the haunting flavour of the stables remained—the old darkly painted beams overhead, the subsidiary antechambers that were still odorous with the scent of hay. There were times, indeed, when in the silence you might have sworn to the ghostly ripple of a tethering chain. Atmosphere enough for that.

. . . *The garden gate clicked . . . gravel grinding and splintering beneath a succession of heavy footsteps. Late holiday-makers? . . . A lazy Oxford accent. A scrap of Hollywood. . . . "Okay, sez he, in his best American!" . . .*

Usually the train to Raddock landed me early enough to mark the arrival of my audience, an opportunity for a little conversation before the work of the evening began. There was a very intelligent trades union official, a number of pit-top workers, the more thoughtful of the colliers and their wives, formidable with a certain northern exclusiveness. It was difficult at first to work one's way through the shell of it—one had to prove oneself—but as time went on, our inter-

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course became more friendly and intimate. My business it was to introduce the company to the main lines of English Literature, and in the converted stables of Raddock many of those colliers heard of Shakespeare, Keats, and Hardy for the first time. They were on the whole—in spite of shyness—excellent students, advancing debate. Before very long a number were writing essays for me, bringing other pieces of writing too. Curious creations these, conserving echoes of the mine, pit-dialect, pit controversy, explosive, wistful.

All of which brings me to the man Robert Faulkner, stealing to his seat in that stable-cum-assembly hall. It was always the seventh seat of the seventh row to the left—the mystical seven, I told myself, even before I grew to be familiar with him, though there was nothing really mystical about his appearance, if you excepted the rather large steel-rimmed spectacles upon the sharp ridge of his nose and the deep unwinking brown of his eyes. His lips were somewhat thinly compressed—nothing mystical in that—his face pale, his figure lean, his clothing a dark and rather shabby clerical grey. In conversation he had the habit of enlarging his eyes rather weirdly, in focus upon a point just over one's shoulder, as though in occult association with some presence not admitted to the business of normal intercourse.

He came forward one night after a talk on Chaucer, moved by the general background, I suppose—that succession of planetary spheres, the Moon, Mercury, Venus, and those influences that made the framework of Chaucer's mentality. He inquired (still looking over my shoulder) if I had ever brought myself to a special study of astrology, and when I answered that I had merely taken on a working knowledge, he commented that he had spent some considerable time upon the subject.

. . . *In the house, fingers were questing piano keys. Through the*

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open window came a low ripple of music, then a brisk shiver of delight from Die Fledermaus . . . a light laugh, and a sudden interruption as of a hand suddenly snatched from the piano. The snapping of the piano cover . . .

In the end he asked permission rather humbly to be allowed to accompany me to the station, and so into the darkness and the towering leafage we went. Outside, his tongue, released, ran on. He had (as I had suspected) soaked himself in some exhaustive and popular book upon the subject. "You know," he submitted, as we dodged the traffic of the main road, "I was born under the sign Gemini, symbolised by the Twins."

"Indeed?" I cried. The introduction of the stars seemed so insignificant a business when side-stepping before an infuriated bundle of machinery. Either one was born under the potency of Gemini or not. "The cursed idiot—probably bought the road!"

"Yes," he continued, addressing the darkness ahead, as though indeed I had not spoken, "I have a dual nature—a nature at war with itself." There was mingled pride and resentment in his tone.

"That's curious," I observed as we entered a side street, and walked into comparative safety. The words seemed almost flippant in that pocket of silence. "How is the time going?" My margin for the train was usually narrow.

"You have any amount of time for the train," he answered disposedly, his shorter feet twinkling to my long stride. Then he said: "I know I shan't get anywhere. It's Gemini with me."

There he was again, reverting to the curious occult announcement. I glanced overhead at the flimsy wrack of cloud beyond which Orion glimmered palely. I remembered the ingrained superstition of the miner, and there was some-

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thing so insistent about his presence that a certain communion did impinge itself. To me, however, it emerged in terms of Chaucer, of Palamon passing to the temple of Venus—"And in hir houre he walketh forth." On second thoughts I felt it safer to inquire in what occupation my new acquaintance was engaged at the pit.

"I am a stone-duster," he said.

"A stone-duster?"

"Scattering dust through the galleries to prevent explosion. Covers up the loose coal-dust, you see, though it's a bright job, I can tell you—part of the dust gets on your own clothing, part on the gallery, and the biggest part in your own stomach and lungs." He coughed harshly, and I thought it a rather forced one.

"Can't you ask for another job?"

"I've had other jobs. Assistant under-manager in my time, and then—dragged down step by step. I didn't know what it was all about then. But I've got the root of it now."

"And what is the root?" I asked unwittingly.

"I told you once," he answered, with ill-concealed forbearance. "Gemini. Astral Vibrations. That's me! Oh, what's the use?" And thrusting his hands into his pockets, he fell into a slouch.

We walked into the station yard—a miserable place, with a blowsy outer lamp. "I've done a bit of writing too," he said in a low voice. "Don't bother to cross the line. You'll get on at this side."

"What kind of writing?" Was there, after all, transmuting this curious obsession, an order of student mind?

"Oh, essays, short stories, plays, novels—a score or two, I should be thinking."

My heart sank beneath the spate of his announcement. I

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said, cheerfully as possible, "Please bring me something along."

"I will," he answered eagerly, "though it won't be until week after next that you get it. Next week is afternoons."

I said: "Please bring me your writing when best you can. I don't mind the week after."

. . . *A match flared, revealing the slender white column of a cigarette . . . the match-light flickering and broken on the leaves of the arbour. The match died out, and with the extinction came the slow readmission of mountain shoulder, and the faintly reproachful light of stars . . .*

The following week, then, I was not surprised to notice the absence of Robert Faulkner. The seventh seat in the seventh row was empty, and as it remained empty, his shadow seemed more and more to fill the vacancy. As the evening wore on, and the cavalcade moved forward to Canterbury, his figure contrived to intermingle with the company.

At the close of the lecture I dropped down into the body of the hall, and approaching my trade union official, commented on the somewhat smaller attendance. "It's the shift system," he explained; "some of the people will be on afternoons, and their wives no doubt will be waiting in for them." When I observed that Robert Faulkner would be included among the afternoon men, he wrinkled his brows darkly. "So you've been talking to Faulkner?" he observed.

"Do you know him?"

"Funny chap," he ventured. "Not without his streak of talent, but can't stick anything long. No backbone. He'd a good job and he lost it. He'd a good lass and he lost her!" My friend pressed his lips together tightly, as though the lass in question had been a member of his own family, a compounding of unpleasant memory. "He's his own enemy,

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that Faulkner. Moody devil!" And beyond that he would say no more.

In due course, the steel-rimmed spectacles, the eyes in mystic focus, came again. He was in the hall when I entered, acknowledging my hasty nod with a steady stare. As I took off my coat and prepared my notes, he shuffled forward, withdrawing from his breast pocket a folded manuscript not a little thumbed, and completely devoid of outer covering. "This is the first act of my play," he said.

"The first act only?"

"That's all there is at present," he coughed.

"Wouldn't you rather I waited for the whole?"

"No," he said bluntly.

I unfolded the manuscript—there were ten or eleven pages of closely written dialogue. With a swift glance I could see that he had almost dispensed with the usual stage directions.

"There'll only be another act," he said. "You shall see that section when it's ready. You can tell me about the beginning without seeing the end." And with that, rather coolly, he meandered off to his accustomed seat. A moment or two later he called out: "I'll have to get away early to-night, I'm on nights, you see." Then he thrust his hands in his pockets, and remained so seated throughout the evening.

As the train swung away from Raddock that night I looked into Robert Faulkner's play. He had made the name of his hero—if hero he could be termed—Richard Ferrar, a similarity of initial suggesting autobiography, though the Ferrar of his creation appeared to be a highly placed colliery official. Nothing strange in that, however. So many efforts of this kind were unashamed autobiography. As I read further it was plain to see that Faulkner's knowledge of stage technique was sadly deficient, his handling of dialogue strained and pseudo-

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literary. At the same time there was a certain forcefulness about the narrative, and a dramatic sequence that might have been convincing with more expert treatment. Things had a knack of happening.

The first act was one of three scenes, including a luscious love affair with a certain Alice Parsons, of which the following is typical : " And yet, Alice darling, even if I were to lose my position as manager, there would still be continuance to our love ? " I pencilled, " Continuance, query," in the margin, though Alice for her part, it must be confessed, contrived to speak somewhat less stiltedly at response. A second scene in the underground office of the colliery I felt much more convincing. There were technical details of mine administration that were quite valid, and a highly terse and workman-like account of a grave misjudgment by the Ferrar in question. I was not surprised, therefore, to discover the third scene back again in the sitting-room of Alice's villa, the lover displaced, and the lady consistently adamant. The " continuance " of this love affair, it would seem, was being gravely imperilled.

. . . *The cigarette died down. In a window behind the light was extinguished. A cool drift of lilac invaded the arbour. . . .*

The week following Robert Faulkner walked down to the station again. His face had grown paler than ever, his cough more obtrusive. The ghostly outline of his features drew nearer as we left the hall together. Then the white blotch turned towards me. " Did you read my stuff ? " he jerked.

I made assent.

" What do you think of it ? "

" Still a disadvantage. You have another section up your sleeve."

" Admitted," he said, as though we were at argument together. " There is a continuance."

" Apart from that," I continued, " your style is not in the

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least idiomatic. Take Ferrar, for example. ‘The continuance of our love,’ he says. Now who uses the word continuance?”

“I do,” said Faulkner simply.

“Well—it’s awkward,” I said.

“It’s me!” he retorted pertly. “Look here, Mr. Jameson,” he continued vehemently, “I may as well admit it flat. I put myself into that play. The Ferrar you spoke about is me! For Ferrar, read Faulkner.”

He was suddenly, savagely silent. “Have you ever been a manager?” I asked.

That touched him. “I held a high position,” he conceded grudgingly. “And I lost it. That’s quite enough. You spoke in your lecture about literary symbols. Well, that’s a symbol. The manager’s a symbol!”

“Was your Alice Parsons reality?”

“She was real enough,” he muttered between his teeth. “The whole of it’s real. In this play I am trying to trace the continuance of Ferrar’s fortunes.”

“I wish Ferrar well,” I said slowly, “whatever the upshot may be.”

He walked on in silence a moment or two, his face averted. Then he said: “I’m not sure whether I intend to work out a comedy or a tragedy. Ferrar’s star says one thing; but will he accept his star?”

“That’s for you to say,” I answered. “Or Gemini.”

“Do you believe in Free Will?” he countered suddenly.

“That’s an old debate,” I said. “If you accept the moral choice in human experience, you must.”

“You do?” he questioned. “I wish I could, but all my experience has been against it. I started life as a pit-boy—cold tea, bread and dripping and coal-dust—I studied, month after month, year after year, God! how I studied. I stayed

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in of nights, I cheated myself of the fresh air and daylight in order to get my mining certificates."

"And you got them?"

"I got them."

"Would you call that failure?"

"Yes," he cried vehemently, "yes—when you see the position that you have built up painfully nibbled into, broken in the gutter by a force that you can't control. Rotten under-manager here, bad roof there, gob-fires everywhere, miscalculation over all. Down, down! I used to give my own orders. Now I take 'em. From every rag-tag and bobtail in the pit. What would you do in such a position?"

"It's difficult to say," I answered.

"It is difficult, damned difficult," he responded, "but I shan't stand it much longer."

"Cheer up!" I called as the train roared in. "See what you make of the second act, and send it on to me when you have finished. Out of the nettle, difficulty," I added, varying the aphorism, "we pluck the flower, safety."

He watched me climb in the compartment, and hung expectantly upon the door handle. "The nettle," he breathed at last. "The nettle, begod!"

For once he stared at me straightly with his deep-set liquid brown eyes. He released his hand and the train ran out. I looked back through the open window, and there he was still staring across the vacant metals, shoulders inclined, head thrust slightly forward. Then he turned abruptly and disappeared in the entrance arch.

For a month after that I saw absolutely nothing of Robert Faulkner. From time to time I found myself pondering the gnawing, distrustful quality of his mind, and the astrological determinism by which it was dominated. I looked up certain authorities on the subject, surveying Aries, Taurus, Cancer,

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and the like. I turned up Gemini, and Gemini did not help. The formula only served to intensify Robert Faulkner's problem.

One evening the postman brought a long, fat envelope. Another manuscript, I considered, as I took it from his hand. I was constantly receiving such communications from my people. When I broke it open I perceived familiar handwriting. It was the second act of Faulkner's play.

I set it aside then for the ordinary reason that I had other things to do at the moment. When I did turn to it (a couple of hours later) I noted that the author had shifted his scene to the colliery workings again—not the underground office this time, but to the innermost workings. The act fell into two scenes. The first represented a visit to the workings of a party from the village, including the girl with whom Ferrar had been connected. There was an underground encounter, a cold word or two of recognition—then a fall of curtain to denote the passage of time. How long a passage the author had forgotten to state. It might have been an hour. It might have been a week. The second scene was played by Ferrar almost alone. There was a little altercation with a deputy. The rest—soliloquy.

At first this latest creation produced the impression of an Inchbald melodrama : “Behold the hollow fraud of charity and love !, etc.,”—knockabout bombast of the early Victorian theatre. “Why should I perpetuate my being upon this stricken planet ?,” etc.

Then the temper of the writing subtly changed, as though the play had been set aside for a period, and resumed in a starker, intenser mood. The sentences became terse, stabbing, and charged with will. In that underground setting Ferrar was lifting his arms to the necessity of the mine and of his own experience with the utmost challenge. “There is an

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end even to the sport of gods ! I have merely to release the prop that supports this roof, and one victim at least will make his departure ! It is the miserable creature himself who cries a halt ! Thus and thus do I cry, ‘ Have done ! ’ And let the roof speak with me ! ”

Additionally he had written : “ It was the end,” crossing out the word ‘ was ’ and substituting ‘ is.’

For a little time I sat staring at the manuscript. Then I re-read the play from the beginning, and increasingly the full significance of the closing sentence took hold upon me. I looked at the post-mark. The letter had been posted early that day, and as the shifts fell I recognised that even at this moment Faulkner would be passing along the roadways underground. The change in tempo, the impact of the closing sentences decided me. I took the time-table and began looking up the trains for Raddock.

There were none handy, and perhaps it was this frustration that decided more than ever my subsequent conduct. I passed down into the hall, put on my cap, and ran out the bicycle. It was a fairish ride to the colliery, I knew. I told myself that I wanted a breather, and that I might as well travel in that direction as in any other.

I shall never forget that ride. I was out of training, for one thing, and the tragic nature of the quest disturbed me. I moiled up the hills, skimmed gratefully the slopes. An hour and a half later I ran down the cinder track to the colliery where Faulkner worked underground—the picture of a damned, stupid, impressionable Quixote, and more than half determined to give up the whole business.

It was just half-past eight, and of course quite dark. The towering head-gear and screens were twinkling with light, a flimsy veil of steam drifting from the engine-house with the quick thrust of the “ drawing.” A slow clash of corves came

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from the pit-head platform. Somewhat nearer were a number of glass-panelled doors upon which I could knock for admission, fully illuminated and receptive. It was in this moment that I realised the full absurdity of my quest.

What now? Ought I to present myself, and with breathless urgency explain that a certain Robert Faulkner, in covert contemplation of suicide, should be discovered to the authorities and restrained instanter? And all upon the prompting of a amateurish two-act play, and a certain fevered speculation! An inner compulsion, however, drove me forward. I opened the first door that I came to—it was panelled and weighty—and I found myself in a building crammed from floor to ceiling with an arrangement of safety-lamps, glittering aggregations of glass and metal, awaiting the fingers of the morning shift. A small man with a greasy rag in his hand peeped from one of the avenues. He approached quizzingly. I said: “I should like a word with one of your workmen at present underground.” He asked: “Is it important?” I answered: “Very.” “Well, then,” he continued, “you’d better go to the time office. They deal with inquiries there.”

Time office? The very name appalled me. I conjured up an inquiry. Questions! More questions! “No, no. Haven’t you some means of communicating here? A telephone, surely?”

“We have a telephone,” said the lampman reluctantly, rubbing his chin. “But it’s for our own business.” I saw, however, that he was to be persuaded. My general concern had evidently aroused his compassion.

“Will you put me in touch with Robert Faulkner? Do you know him?”

“I know Faulkner,” he answered tersely. “But I don’t know where he may be in the pit. He might be in the bottom, he might be a couple o’ miles out Bedding way.”

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The lampman assessed his distance topographically. I suggested that Faulkner would be acting on the instructions of someone in authority. "No doubt. No doubt," agreed the other. "I'll try the pit-bottom first for ye. What did ye say the message was?"

I mumbled that it was important, for at the moment I had hardly decided what to say. The first thing to ascertain was whether Faulkner was still in the land of the living. I watched the lampman agitate the telephone bar. There was no response, and he sighed impatiently. Then the bell rang. "Aye, fathead, it's me!" he bellowed down the receiver. "Now can ye tell me whether Bob Faulkner's near the bottom—or where he is. I've a message for him. Eh? Aye, Faulkner. And make thy heels crack! . . . Na then! Na then!"

The lampman tossed his rag loosely in the air, and as loosely caught it. I discovered later that such messages from the lamp-room were not an infrequent occurrence. Then he left the telephone and pottered about with a number of lamp parts that he seemed to be assembling. The bell rang again, and he strolled over listening. He turned to me. "Faulkner is up number two slants. They say they can send up your message now if you like."

"Tell him," I said suddenly, "that Mr. Jameson wishes to see him outside at the shift end—that Mr. Jameson will be waiting for him." The lampman repeated the message. "What time will he be out?" I asked. "In about an hour from now," said the man. "You can say a good hour too."

There was nothing more for it than to leave the lamp-room and walk the cinder track outside. It was all really too absurd, I told myself, as I considered the message now being flashed to the innermost workings of the pit, apprehension nurtured upon a flimsy manuscript. I wondered what on

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earth I should say to Faulkner when he did arrive. I conjured up the swift satiric gleam that would light up his eye. "So I decided to invite you over . . . and being in the neighbourhood, you see——?"

As I passed the time office I heard a telephone bell ring, then I saw the watchman unhooking the receiver. I passed the angle of the building losing sight of him for a moment. The next I heard was the sound of a man running. I turned to see a figure disappear through the lamp-room door. A stride or two, and another man emerged, flinging on his jacket. He also ran into the night, while the watchman returned to his office again, once more to the telephone, plugging in one switch after another. His every gesture was one of urgency. He moved briskly, slickly, like an automaton. What had happened?

I approached the lamp-room door slowly and peered in. The lampman, in consultation with a small knot of his assistants, broke away and came nearer. He jerked his thumb vaguely. "That there pal o' thine—if he is a pal o' thine—has copped it!"

"Faulkner?" I said.

"He's been under a 'fall.' They're going to bring him out."

I found myself trembling slightly. "Is he dead?" I asked, hoping that I displayed no manner of public distress.

The lampman shook his head. "It's a stretcher case. That's all I can tell ye just now."

And so it had happened at last? The grand revolt against Gemini? I realised that there was nothing to do but to wait, and to wait with all the patience that one could muster.

"But how did the 'fall' happen?" I questioned.

"How does a 'fall' happen?" said the lampman cryptically. A 'fall' was a 'fall,' one of the accepted hazards of the mine.

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I went outside. The minutes dragged. I grew weary of the crick-crick-crinkle of ashes beneath my feet. After a time I returned. "Have they brought him out yet?"

"It's a slow job to the pit-bottom," said the lampman. "Bad going. I'll let ye know when he comes, mester."

A quarter of an hour passed. Twenty minutes. Half an hour. The clash of corves came to an end, and I sensed with the sudden inquietude that they were clearing the cage for a passenger. I turned to the watchman. "May I go to the pit-head platform?"

"Tha'll see all tha wants to see, here," he said.

"Is he badly hurt?"

"Bad enow." The watchman took a swig of tea from his flask. "Relation o' thine?"

"No relation."

At length the stretcher-bearers came through the half-light, with a slight swaying of their burden, and a steady creaking of shoulder-straps. The ambulance had backed to the bottom of the steps, its flaps outflung to receive the injured man. I stood very still beside it. The stretcher would pass the full revelation of the lamp-room windows.

Then they brought him, curiously quiescent and pale, his face alone showing above the coats and sacking with which they had covered him. With a touch of thoughtfulness they had set his glasses upon his nose, and in the moment I wondered if the thought had been his or theirs.

They lowered him to the ground, and in that moment he opened his eyes and looked upon me. Had the message been communicated? It was, I fancied, a remote and weary stare. He closed his eyes, the stretcher still halting, while brisk fingers nipped away the coats that for warmth had been piled upon his body, substituting blankets. There were no scars that I could see, but he was very still.

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They took up the stretcher, and he opened his eyes again. "Gemini," he murmured faintly, whimsically, almost on a note of irony. "Gemini?" And that was all. His face had fallen into almost peaceful lines; the eyelids, grimy and grey, closed again as they ran him into the vehicle. Then the doors eased in, shutting off all communication.

I never saw him again.

. . . *A mist was creeping along the shoulder of the mountain. The fragrance of the lilac diminished—the sound of late, nocturnal voices. The high road long ago had melted into silence . . .*

After that I attended the old hall several times, passing along the same tenuous avenue, beneath the same unquiet aspens. Sometimes the seventh seat on the seventh row was occupied, sometimes not. It hardly mattered now. The manuscript I placed with my other manuscripts, accumulating dust.

And even now, sitting so dispassionately, I cannot decide whether it was that Faulkner with a final establishment of will decided to knock out the fateful prop himself, or whether the merciless, unsleeping necessity of the mine relieved him at last of the whole responsibility.

. . . *The mist ascended. One by one the stars were quenched . . . Gemini indeed? What do you think?*

Moonbeams—1917

A QUAINt elfin face looked in at the casement window upon the girl who slept in the rose room. She was smiling as she lay asleep. The moonbeams touched her white eyelids and played in the meshes of her loosened hair.

The elf was very slim, and taller than an elf should be. He had pointed ears like a faun, and a mouth that curled up at the corners.

The girl moved restlessly in her sleep, and the moon was obscured by a passing cloud.

* * *

The young man was poised on the brick wall which enclosed the mulberry walk. His knees were drawn up to his pointed chin, his bright eyes shone with a mischievous gleam.

It was just then that the girl turned the bend of the walk. She was dressed in white sprigged muslin, with a blue riband girding her waist. Her wide-open blue eyes gave her a startled expression. The elf thought of her white lids closed in sleep, and hugged the remembrance to his heart.

“It’s quite all right,” he called: “I won’t hurt you. I am very ugly, but really harmless.”

“I am not afraid of being hurt,” she replied.

“That’s a pity. You are so fragile you must be careful, you know, or you might break.”

When the girl smiled two bewitching dimples appeared in her cheeks.

“I have seen someone exactly like you before,” she said.
“Oh—I beg your pardon——”

“Why?”

“Because I’ve just remembered where.”

“Tell me.”

“No—it might hurt you.”

“Nothing hurts me. I am accustomed to my ugliness, and to being laughed at.”

“I wasn’t laughing at you.”

“You smiled—that was letting me down gently, perhaps. But tell me where have you seen me?”

“It’s a stone image poised on the tippety-top of the little turret belonging to the old wing of the house. It looks right into my room.”

“I have seen you too.”

“Why, that’s impossible—you see, I only arrived yesterday.”

“I saw you last night among the moonbeams. God’s truth!”

Then he dropped noiselessly from the wall. There was a faint rustle of leaves as the wind stirred the branches of the mulberry trees overhead.

* * *

“I never thought you would have to go to France, you are so young.”

“Not too young.”

“War is a terrible thing.”

“But it’s going on around us all the time. The big

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things swallow up the little things in this rum old world. It will always be like that."

"Somehow you look different in khaki."

"I'm glad. Perhaps I look more like a man, and less like a gargoyle."

"I didn't mean that."

"I know you didn't."

"Then don't—it hurts."

"Does it really?" he asked eagerly.

A tear splashed on his hand.

"What—as much as that?"

"You are always teasing."

They were standing close together; the elf was taller than the girl, and he had to bend his head when he looked into her eyes.

"If I were to tell you the truth, you would only laugh at me. You see, I know the limitations of a poor ugly devil."

"No—no—not *devil*."

"Only in one sense, because I am going away from you. I love all beautiful things—flowers . . . birds . . . butterflies . . . and you."

"I see, I come last."

"First among the flowers, and last by yourself."

"I am so glad that you love me twice over. Oh, Peter, how I wish you were not going away!"

He dropped on one knee before her, worshipping, and she laid her hand tenderly on his bowed head—she could not see his face through a mist.

"I picked up some acorns yesterday. Let's plant one in the mulberry walk—just for remembrance," he said to her, presently.

They scampered off like two mischievous children. And

that was how an oak tree came to be planted in the mulberry walk.

“ You’ll come back—you promise ? ”

“ If I don’t, sweetheart, you’ll know I’ve ‘ gone west.’ ”

He tried to infuse a tone of cheerfulness in this statement, but it was difficult when he looked into her periwinkle-blue eyes that were misty with tears. “ Oh, not for me,” he added hastily : “ it’s—it’s unlucky to cry, you know, when you bid a soldier ‘ good-bye.’ ”

“ I won’t cry,” she said bravely.

* * *

Moonbeams touched the eyelids of the little white girl who slept in the rose room. Through the casement window a whisper came to her on the breeze—all the way from France, where the same moonbeams looked down.

She sat up in bed, suddenly wide awake.

“ Peter . . . ” she cried, “ oh, Peter, did it hurt very much ? ”

KAY BOYLE

Keep Your Pity

MR. JEFFERSON was an American, a good and simple man, so he did not see these people as they were : haughty, aloof, almost distasteful in their pride. He did not see them, the two old people, as weird as skeletons jerking down the walk ; his eyes swathed them in weakness and frailty, and smoothed out the skin that hung crumpled and soft from their faces. Mr. Jefferson sat on the café terrace and watched them coming down the promenade one morning after another in the sun : colourless in their flesh, with a faint smell of the spring on them, shaking a little on their limbs as the first pale mimosa flowers quivered on the branch.

It was the sun that brought them forth, making new promises every day to them. He wore a tight-fitting black-and-auburn check, old Mr. Wycherley, and a tan bowler hat, light in colour, and he must have been elegant in his time. But now his time was past, or should have been, and there was nothing to be said for the cut of his jacket at the waist, nor for the black silk stock that wound glossy around his haggard throat. He was a genteel old man, to the eye, with his wife on his arm, and she with her lids swollen yellow and thin as gauze under her veil, wearing plum velvet and a litter of tiger-cats' hides fast on the points of her shoulders.

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They had no use for pity, having seen it a common thing in the faces of everyone passing. And there was no need to give it, for they had their own style, their own special wraith-like air amongst the living contemporary people walking by the Mediterranean Sea. No one need have pitied them their transparent hands on their canes, for when they paused to stroke the thin cat near Mr. Jefferson's table they did not speak of its bones or hunger; there was something like mockery or greed in the eye they gave it. They ran their old hands over the links of its spine, touching its nobs curiously, as if for the value of the skin or the real amber in the sockets of its head. Mr. Jefferson witnessed, as a blind man might, this spectacle. He heard their childish, pure voices speaking English, and because they had halted there and stroked the animal, he took for mercy the rapacity of their hearts.

He heard the old lady say in her querulous, pride-bitten way: "It's damnable small, Mr. W."

And the old gentleman answered, quoting in proud, elegant French: "*Va, garde ta pitié comme ton ironie.*" Keep it for yourself, Mrs. W. There's no telling but what you may have need of one or the other some day."

Mr. Jefferson had come the week before to Nice, an American sitting there in his good grey suit, with the unfailing credulous soul of his country lighted in his eye. He was presented by the French people sitting next at the café table where the Wycherleys had paused to speak a moment. They were the aristocrats, the high-and-mighty old couple, the seemingly frail and gracious pair. They gave a great interest and care to their conversations, and to the conversations of people they exchanged the time of day with, as if some great ear were gaping in space, spying forever on what they had to say. But they never accepted the invitations to sit down on the

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café terrace, but halted at one table or the next, talking with charm but inscrutably to those they knew, but moving on as if an hour had been fixed elsewhere with someone else who might even now be waiting. Mr. Wycherley held his hat pressed to his linen vest as he spoke. His thin yellowish-white hair was parted to one side and smoothed across, lying listless, as the fingers of a dead man might have laid upon his skull.

They had simply bowed to Mr. Jefferson, but then, a thunderclap to their reason, they felt his hands fall in familiarity upon their arms. The sun was out, and the air melting and fair, but the blast of their horror swept them cold. They stood rooted, their sap standing motionless in their veins and their senses stilled in fright. Before them the American's face was grimacing and urging, as though it would be a gift from their hearts to him if they should bend their brittle knees and take the empty chairs. He did not know what kept them from sitting; he did not know if it was for fear of their antique clothes splitting up the seams, or for fear of what he might do or say.

"You'd be doing me a favour," said Mr. Jefferson gently, "if you'd have a little glass . . ."

But Mr. Wycherley cried out: "Ah, no, sir, we do not drink!"

His bones seemed to buckle and knock in his skin as he stepped back in his pumps and gaiters from Mr. Jefferson's table. His voice ran fast through his smooth shining lips, his head reared on the cords of his neck, and his wild glance smote the stranger's viciously in mistrust. He saw the American as many things, the man sitting there, his eyes a straight unwinking blue behind his big-hewed features, and a little mat of greying hair set up on the top of his head.

"Well, if you'd sit down, then, and have a little talk," said

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Mr. Jefferson, with the slow wistful smile so little matched to the clanging voice. "I'm new to this country. I feel like a fish out of water with all this parley-voo."

So after awhile they saw it—through their suspicion for what he might be they saw the accumulated hunger for speech that sucked away at his clean-shaven jaws. He knew no one in the city, he said, and this did not touch them, although they saw his solitude very well. He was famished for kind words to be spoken to him, and there they stood listening, warily, giving nothing from their deceptive silence. He sat talking, with his glass on the table before him, with no thought of rising in respect, though he was still a youngish man, forty-five or less.

"This is called the city of perfume and flowers," said Mrs. Wycherley in her frail wincing voice. She spoke breathlessly, in caution to him, as a young woman speaking her marriage vows might do. This was her welcome to Mr. Jefferson, although she smiled little because of the holes in the far sides of her mouth where the teeth were missing.

"That's what I'm here for," said Mr. Jefferson. As he talked they could see the absolute wastes and stretches without beauty that lay behind him. Strange, strange, the undulations of life given so in a few uneasy sentences to them. They stood with their eyes bright and callous before the spectacle of his years running quick over impediments and falls, the narrow, tortuous current of his life passing with difficulty before them, like a stream squeezed hard in its bed. But now the time for rest had come, he said. Now he could sit still, if he liked, and watch the waters of his repose lap in expansion, far, and deep, and wide.

He was from Ohio, and in this way he talked of his home until they saw it, even as much as some details of it, in their cold perverse hearts. The dust lay three inches deep on the

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roads in the summer-time, he said, and in winter there was the cold, and the months of the winter were laid away in the country, sunless and endless.

"And here, sir," said Mr. Wycherley, with his smile in his long old teeth, and his bowler hat pressed over his linen vest: "here, although we are not native *sons*, we enjoy the native *sun*!"

Mrs. Wycherley looked slyly at the American and laughed her faint high laughter. But Mr. Jefferson had seemingly not heard, or else not understood. There he sat, thinking of the many years of perseverance that had brought him so far and left him idle there.

"I cleared out of things just in time," he was saying. "I wasn't really hit at all. What I've got put away, I want it to pay me some dividends in real enjoyment now." But there was the wistful, the hopeless longing in his mouth, sorrowing of itself under the hard ringing clamour of his voice. He had worked so hard, gone in the teeth of it for so long that now there was no place of rest and pleasure left vacant for him any more.

"I built up my business alone," he was saying, not in pride, but in mild complaint to them. "I sold out at a profit this year. Now my time's all my own," he said in sorrow. "All my own." He had no one to share it with. The two old people stood still, eyeing him with cold vulture-like, inward eyes.

"Why don't you folks have dinner with me?" Mr. Jefferson said.

Such speech in the mouth of any other man would have sent them off in affront, but this man was speaking out of his own ignorance to them. There was no hesitation in Mr. Wycherley's mind: he knew very well they could never sit down at table with this stranger. He was some kind of a court fool,

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a jester, and they, in their pride, were the royalty in a high, indifferent society of death.

" You're kind indeed, sir," said Mr. Wycherley bowing. " I'm afraid we shall have to beg off this time," said the old man, smiling down from his perilous height of race and breeding upon Mr. Jefferson. " Mrs. Wycherley and I have guests to dinner . . ."

" Damn it, I'm hungry," said Mrs. Wycherley, and her under lip went wrinkled and small as if she were about to cry.

" As I was saying," said the old gentleman, and he cleared his throat in rebuke at her, " Mrs. Wycherley and I have guests, rather distinguished guests, as it happens . . ."

They had lived twelve years in the apartment, almost without event, it might be said. But when they came home from their talk with the American, a new thing awaited them. There was a blue notice pasted flat on the wood of their handsome ancient door. Surely some warning must have been given, but although they searched the confusion of their thoughts for it, no memory of it lingered. They had done the four flights at length, with the breath running thin in their lungs, and when they paused, gasping, they saw the blue paper fixed fast to the door.

Mr. Wycherley put his glasses on his nose and began reading it aloud : it said because you have not paid, or because you will not pay, or because you cannot pay the rent for the last quarter and this, everything inside will be laid hold of to-morrow morning at nine o'clock. Mr. Wycherley took out his pocket-handkerchief and passed it over his face in haste as if to wipe from his features any signs of fear. Then he began to laugh aloud :

" Ha, ha, ha," said Mr. Wycherley. " Here's a fine one ! This is a good joke indeed ! I'll have to run over and see Jean Medecin ! "

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Jean Medecin was the mayor of Nice, and although they did not know him, the sound of his name spoken now lifted their long heavy heads rearing like a bit in the mouth. But the divinity had faded in Mrs. Wycherley's face, and she stood by his side shaking.

"Preposterous!" cried Mr. Wycherley sternly to her. Hand in hand their minds went back, groping through the uneasy darkness of their memories. Had they paid, or had they not, or why had they not? "Take my arm," said Mr. Wycherley. "This is the most preposterous thing!"

Twelve years, they were thinking, twelve years. They stood quiet, groping slowly back through the confusion, feeling for the corners and grooves of something known in the darkness. And then suddenly Mr. Wycherley touched it and drew it forth tentatively, little by little, to the light.

"The proprietor called in a month ago, didn't he, Mrs. W.?" he said. "Didn't he speak of raising the rent?"

The dew on her brow shone strangely out, supernaturally lucent, yet milky, like mother-of-pearl.

"Herriot shall hear of this," said Mr. Wycherley. Herriot was the mayor of Lyons, and with the strength of that name in their ears they unlocked the door and passed through it, arm in arm, together. She had no strength left to put out her hand and lift the edge of her velvet, and it rode in silence and majesty over the threshold's stone.

They proceeded to the bedroom together, with such dignity, as if the invisible eye were watching, the unseen ear listening still in space. Here was the garden-party to which they had been invited: the false Aubusson over the bed, the paper flowers blooming on the chimney, and the two windows with the shutters drawn in combs of sun. Outside the sun was shining hot and bright on the square named after Garibaldi. The grey coat of a goat or two had been stitched

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together into a square coarse rug, and it might have been a soiled chrysanthemum discarded there and fading on the floor.

"Now, Mrs. W.," said Mr. Wycherley, "you go to bed, my dear."

She seemed to be slipping, slipping away in bewilderment, with only the hard active bubbles of her eyes riding to the surface of her confusion. She sat on the side of the bed, thinking that the police should never get the goat-skin rug, but there seemed no certainty left in her. There she sat, curved and senseless in her velvets, speechless on the Aubusson greens and blues of the iron bed.

Old Mr. Wycherley went to her and undid the small pearl buttons at her throat. He was very careful with her, unhooking her sleeves to the elbow, carefully, as if her bones were made of glass, lifting her skirt to loosen her garters, and his fingers quivering with age. When he laid the lace collar back from her neck, the whale-bonings in their frenzy seemed to writhe. Only when he touched the quaking brim of her hat did she stir and say :

"Hold on, Mr. W., I'll keep my hat where it is."

Mr. Wycherley took off his own jacket, folded it and set it down with his cane and his bowler hat on a chair. His white linen vest covered his braces from sight, but in a moment he took that off and laid it in a drawer with his black silk stock. She could see his face reflected in the glass, the finely-wrinkled jowls hanging, and the wild eyebrows standing forth, white and abundant. There was a strange, a powerful smile of victory on his mouth.

"Life," he called out, "ah, life, ah, life, the tricks it can conceive to play on one! Inestimable, inestimable, and one must be prepared with a counter-check for every move that's made!"

So he spoke to the memory of his wife left lying on the bed,

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or to the ear that eavesdropped forever in censure. He doubled his arm up, and the shirt-sleeve was turned up above the elbow. His arm was bony and long, and when he clenched the long, loose hand the shifting ball of muscle rolled up, tied fast as it was with the full blue veins under his pure white skin.

"You've got a husband, Mrs. W.," he said, with his vanity getting the best of him at last. "A man to stand between you and the onslaught. Climb under the covers. There's a man's work to be done."

II

Mr. Wycherley made the tea at seven in the morning and bore it in on a tray to the thin little old lady who sat motionless against the pillows. She was sitting quite erect, but her head, with the black lace hat still on it, was drooping forward like a heavy wilting flower. She had no human look in her eye for him, none; the canny, the wily jet of her eyesight ran here and there at random like shiny beads unstrung.

"When you've had your tea, then you'll dress and go, Mrs. W.," said old Mr. Wycherley, setting the tea down beside her. She was looking through him at the wood of their dark, ancient furniture beyond. Her eyes clicked over the glass of the wardrobe that held so many beauties; it might have been a silver-screen on which the great dramas of her youth and life were passing.

"There may be harsh words exchanged," Mr. Wycherley was saying, and he watched her hand fall in greed upon the bread by her plate. "I wouldn't want you to hear anything unpleasant, Mrs. W."

"Damned if I'll move a foot," said Mrs. Wycherley. Her eyes had bubbled up from the source of mystery again and were turned upon his face. If it had come into her head that

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this was the first time they had spoken of separation, or had come to things and not passed through them together, she gave no sign of it. Mutely she took down her tea and stepped from the bed while Mr. Wycherley finished his dressing. It was the touch of the goat-hair hide under her bare foot that startled the memory in her. She stooped and seized it up by one corner, and the lace hat quivered in wild agitation on her head.

"Mr. W.," she said, "I'll take the goat-rug with me."

When she was dressed in her velvet, she pinned the rug over her shoulders. She moved quietly down the hall, with an aura of dust riding out from behind, and through the parlour in silence. In front of the chimney-piece she paused and vaguely plucked a candelabra from the mantel-shelf. She went mutely, a ravaged, haggard-eyed queen of sorrow, mutely after Mr. Wycherley into the kitchen with her plum skirt following elegantly behind. One hand was fast on the handle of her cane, and the candelabra was in the other. When she drifted to a halt at the stove, she saw that Mr. Wycherley was laughing. The laughter was shaking under his linen vest and blowing in dry blasts through his conqueror's nose.

He said: "I've done a most ingenious thing, Mrs. W." He pointed to the sink, and Mrs. Wycherley saw the string and the rubber hosing whipped fast around the faucet. "This runs through the hall," said her husband, "ties up with a sinker and fishing-rod over the front door and carries the aqueduct upwards."

He offered her his arm, and they went down the length of the narrow sightless corridor together. It seemed a gay and lavish thing to Mrs. Wycherley, a thing in preparation for a *fête*, the cord and the hosing winding in and out like a clinging vine above them. Mr. Wycherley was laughing youthfully

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by her side. "If anyone pulls the bell-handle," he said, "a stream of fresh water jerked through the transom will persuade our good friends to think twice before ringing again. . . ."

Slowly, as Mr. Wycherley explained, Mrs. Wycherley began to see it; slowly, revealingly, like a negative emerging, shadow by shadow, from its acid bath. The two old people stood there laughing, their loose jaws fallen open, their limbs shaking with their clamour, snickering in their skins, and their necks stretched for it.

"Once you are safely out, Mrs. W.," said Mr. Wycherley, suddenly clapping into silence his laughter, "I'll fetch the sack of flour on to the door-knob and raise it to the transom. . . ."

When Mrs. Wycherley stepped into the street, the freshness of his lips where he had saluted her was still cool as mint on the back of her hand.

"So he worked all night at that, did he?" said Mr. Jefferson. There he sat at the café table, harking to her under the deepening tides of sun.

But Mrs. Wycherley could not remember. She was sitting as if at ease with the American, with the goat-rug fastened with nursery-pins across her shoulders, but her face was pure of colour, and blue pits of drama and fear were excavated under her bird-bright eyes.

"Perhaps half the week!" she said with spirit. "He's very ingenious, Mr. Jefferson!"

To this man, this absolute stranger, Mrs. Wycherley knew she had said many things. The evil empty glass of port was standing before her in the sun, and she felt its madness in her face: two coals of colour burning as if the fever of her fear had smouldered into light.

"But it couldn't have been all the week," said Mr. Jefferson, patiently feeling the way.

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"All I know," said Mrs. Wycherley with sudden conviction, "is that when he called my attention to it this morning, damned if I could believe my eyes!"

"Ho, ho, an inventor!" said Mr. Jefferson slowly. "By George, it takes the old guys! Look at Edison. Thomas Edison."

"I don't know who he is," said Mrs. Wycherley, facing him with her hard, sharp, unchanging eyes.

"Well, take Bell," said Mr. Jefferson. "Take Bell . . ."

"Take Mr. Wycherley, damn it," said the old lady sharply. "Eleven o'clock now, and no sign of him." She gave her withered, wincing laugh and looked up slyly and sideways at Mr. Jefferson. "If he had the money to go on with his inventions, he might invent almost anything. He might invent the wireless if he were given any support."

"Yes, it takes his kind of mind to think of such things," said Mr. Jefferson, shaking his head. "Like that flour-and-water invention," he said, trotting his tongue, lost in thought or awe on the other side of the table.

When Mrs. Wycherley stood up, the promenade swept about and made a deep curtsy to her. She put out her hand and lifted the candelabra from the café table and held it forth.

"Mr. Jefferson, I am beginning to feel perturbed about Mr. W.," she said, and the words were strange and cumbrous on her tongue.

"I'll walk along with you, ma'am, if you'll allow," said Mr. Jefferson, rising.

She knew she was in a state of intoxication when she tried to climb the stairs.

"We were expecting unpleasant callers this morning, Mr. Jefferson," she said brightly, and suddenly she put her hand to the side of her face and began to cry.

KAY BOYLE

"Why, Mrs. Wycherley," said the American, taking the candelabra from her, "this is too bad, now, too bad."

"It was the police who were coming," she said, but the sound of the truth was as good as a slap in the face to her. She looked straight into Mr. Jefferson's blue eyes; standing there fierce and straight with her hand quivering on her cane.

"They're persecuting him because he's a genius, Mr. Jefferson," she said fiercely. "They've accused him of plagiarism. But it isn't so. He was the first, the very first, but they're after him for being clever."

"The police!" said Mr. Jefferson. He whistled softly. "You don't say so, Mrs. Wycherley!"

They started up the stairs, Mr. Jefferson's arm on one side of her, and the cane on the other to bear her up, and the empty candelabra held in Mr. Jefferson's hand.

"The police are all from Corsica here," Mrs. Wycherley was saying wildly. "If they see anyone with force of character, they must track them down. They've been waiting year after year for another leader. They're so envious of the Italians because of Mussolini, whose name we mustn't say here. You must call him Mr. Smith, Mr. Jefferson, whenever you speak of him. Mr. W. keeps me up on politics. If they've put him in jail, I'll get in touch with someone higher up. Anatole France said if there was ever any trouble we were to let him know."

The breath was shaking for peace in her throat, and at the fourth-floor landing they halted. There was flour and water spilled out on the boards there, and the blue warning pasted still on the door.

"If Mr. W. had the wherewithal," said the old lady hoarsely, "damned if they'd attack him."

When she lifted her quivering hand and drew the long pin from the lacy crown, her hat went riding sideways on her

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head. Mr. Jefferson stood by, watching her as she ran the pin under the notice, ripping it up in soft furrows of paper with the flexible length of the pin. Her mouth was drawn up and tied fast like a bowknot under her nose, and her eyes never shed their inscrutable dark veneer. But Mr. Jefferson did not believe in what he saw; old ladies, their hair, their frailty, their querulousness even, struck a chord of puerile gallantry in his heart.

Mrs. Wycherley pulled the rope of the hanging bell and a jet of water sprang out from the transom and fell upon their heads. There they stood quietly waiting, Mrs. Wycherley under the goat-skin rug, and the water dripping quietly off the brim of Mr. Jefferson's panama hat and down the length of his nose; the candelabra in Mr. Jefferson's hand held to the fore, as if to cast light on the landing's darkness.

After awhile, Mrs. Wycherley called out: "Benedict! Benedict!" She rapped on the panel of the door with the head of her delicate cane, and they heard the bolts slip on the other side, and then Mr. Wycherley opened the door slightly.

"Mr. Wycherley," the American began at once, "I've been hearing a great deal about your inventions."

They could see him, wedged, tall and over-bearing, suspicious still, in the opening, with his yellowish hair parted like wax on his head; uncertain, and fingering the chain on his vest, not quite ready to open to them.

"You're very kind indeed, sir," said Mr. Wycherley, bowing. "Won't you and your wife step inside?"

"My wife?" said Mr. Jefferson, but there was no confusion in the old lady's face. She put her arm through the American's. "This is Mrs. Wycherley!" Mr. Jefferson said.

The old man opened the door to them.

"Ah, yes, I dare say it is," he said wearily. Wearily he led the way into the parlour and indicated the arm-chairs in the

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shadow to them. His shoulders, in the great length of his coat, were stooped; even his presence, so schooled, so rigid, seemed drooping on the air. "I haven't seen her for some years," he said.

Mr. Jefferson set the candelabra on the mantel-piece and Mrs. Wycherley unpinned the goat-skin rug from her shoulders and spread it on the floor. When they were seated, the three of them in the dimness of the blinded room, Mr. Jefferson began to speak.

"I'm interested in inventions," he said with respect. "I think I could make it worth your while to go on, Mr. Wycherley."

The old lady lifted her hand to remove the remaining pins from her hat and looked sharply at the American.

"I'd like to donate some money," said Mr. Jefferson, "to the interests of science."

"My good sir," said Mr. Wycherley with his aged, withering charm. "You are very kind, but I could not hear of it."

Mr. Jefferson turned his head and looked at the old lady, and Mrs. Wycherley looked sharply at the American and slowly winked one eye.

"I'd like to put an amount in the bank, and you could draw on it as you needed, Mr. Wycherley," said the American.

"My good sir," said Mr. Wycherley again, "if you are determined to persist upon the realisation of inestimably high qualities, it is scarcely my place to forbid you to convert them into whatever exchange you value. But I must say that I consider it an act in very questionable taste, and I insist that it be regarded in the light of a temporary loan."

In the mock twilight of the shuttered room, the three of them sat waiting for what next would be said.

"I could arrange to pay you a percentage," said Mr. Wycherley in a measured tone out of the stillness.

KEEP YOUR PITY

"Yes," said Mr. Jefferson. "That would do very well. A percentage on every invention made."

A week later Mr. Jefferson went back to the States, and they never saw anything more of him except the money and the post-cards he sent.

III

It was the second year after the money began coming to them that Mrs. Wycherley brought the first cats in from the street. Whether they would or whether they wouldn't, she would have them in off the street and into the backroom next the kitchen: the men of the race to the one side with a barricade of chicken-wire between them and the mothers and young on the other.

She would go over the back-fences of the quarter for them, for now that Mr. Wycherley was an inventor, a man who made his own way, his time was taken up and his hours filled for him. When Mrs. Wycherley came in on tip-toe with the latest cat under her arm, she could see him sitting in the parlour, his hands folded on the papers that she had laid neatly on the table before him. The cries of the newest cat caught and held fast in her hands pierced the absolute silence of what Mr. Wycherley was always about to do.

It was as if their status had been altered, for the time was no longer left to them to linger on the promenade at the café tables, speaking with the people there they knew. Twice in the week they went out together, but now Mr. Wycherley was a man with a vision, an inventor, and the menace of his career hung over them, like a shadow about to fall.

In December the neighbours began speaking of it, began saying that Mr. Wycherley did not come out any more. They spoke to the old lady in the hall, and then they passed on, wondering. The look on her face was strange and high and

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secret. Only once, when the two women were shaking out their door-mats at their thresholds, did the neighbour opposite on the landing speak to Mrs. Wycherley about her husband.

“How is Mr. Wycherley these days?” the Frenchwoman said.

The wave of pride and secrecy went over the old lady’s delicate crumpled face, rose to the smooth edifice of her brow, submerged feature after feature until only her clear obdurate eyes were left exempt.

“Mr. Wycherley is absorbed in his inventing,” she said. She spoke with such equity, such natural contempt, that it put an end at once to the questioning. In a moment she stooped over and shook out the mat in her brittle hand. There was a mauve silk scarf tied around her head to save her hair from the dust.

“It is something that will keep flowers from fading,” she said to the other woman. The two of them looked strangely at each other across the dusty landing. “It is something to keep the dead from corruption,” said Mrs. Wycherley with an evil gleam. “It will make him famous all over the world.”

The neighbour watched her drift through her own doorway, move like a sleep-walker into the dark of her own corridor. There was no other word spoken, no sound except the whisper of the old lady’s slippers over the tiles, slipping, slipping into the absolute darkness, and then the door closed behind.

In this way they saw her sliding out all through the month of December, moving out as if in a dream to fetch the bread on the Place Garibaldi and the other things the two of them were used to eat. But when on New Year’s Eve there was no sign of Mr. Wycherley, then the story began to run from mouth to mouth throughout the house. They began to say that Mr. Wycherley had taken the money out of the bank and

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run away from his wife. They all knew about the money the rich American had given, and they began saying that it was the number of cats in the apartment that had driven Mr. Wycherley mad. He must have taken his clothes and things with him at night and gone off early in December; a month now since he had gone away.

The story was blowing now like a high wind through the place, so after the holidays the proprietor came and asked for Mr. Wycherley. It was the middle of the morning, and Mrs. Wycherley was dressed for her shopping, with her lace collar buttoned up under her ears. There she stood in the piece of the doorway, her hat on, peering up her nose, looking, as if sightless, up into the proprietor's thick unflickering face. Everyone had a certain respect and homage for this man, a special concern because his son, an automobile racer, had been killed on the race-course in his Bugatti scarcely a week before.

The father bereaved stood at the door dressed in his clothes of mourning. There was a hush and expectancy up and down the halls and stairways of the house. He was dressed in black for the death of his son, but because he was a Niçois there was much of the Italian in him, and behind his solemn mask and sleeping temper there was almost a chuckle waiting in his throat. He took off his broad black hat and spoke gravely to Mrs. Wycherley.

"I'd like to have a word or two with your husband, with Mr. Wycherley," he said.

"Mr. Wycherley is busy with his work," said the old lady, but even as she spoke her spirit faltered and swooned. She was too weary, too old, too worn now to face them alone. She shrunk back against the wall and the man pushed his own way in. He went down the dark passage, clearing his throat aloud, attempting to hum a tune in his throat to hearten his dismay. Now he knew, now he knew what it was for certain.

KAY BOYLE

He beat his broad black hat against the side of his trousers as he walked. Now he knew, he knew very well. He knew what he was going to see when he opened the parlour door. He took out his handkerchief and covered his nose and mouth with it before he walked into the room.

Mr. Wycherley was sitting there fully-dressed at the table, but he made no move when the proprietor came in. His hands were laid out on the papers before him and his head had fallen side-ways. The old lady came up and stood still in the doorway.

"You see, he's working," she said.

"Yes," said the proprietor. "Yes, I see."

He went out into the hall with her and closed the door, and he said : "I'll be back in a little while, Mrs. Wycherley. We'll have to take your husband away."

"No, he'll stay here, damn it," said the old lady sharply. "I won't let him out of the house in the delicate condition he's in."

"We aren't going to hurt him," said the proprietor, putting his hat on. "I'll come back with some friends and we'll take him out for a little drive."

He was not afraid, he had seen death before, and in violent shapes and ways he had seen it. But he wanted to get quickly down the hall and out of the door. He shook Mrs. Wycherley's breakable hand, and he said :

"A little air won't harm him, Mrs. Wycherley."

She could hear the chuckle lurking in his throat.

"Mr. W.," she said vaguely at the door, "he never cared for driving. You're very kind, I'm sure," she said.

The report ran this way, saying that when the door was broken in there was nothing to be seen in the darkness, but the objects, whatever they were, hanging over the doorway hit every officer in the face as he passed under. Once they

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switched on the light they saw it was the old English lady hanging, hung just there in the doorway, with malice, so that her feet caught each one of them, even the proprietor, square in the face.

And that was not the end of it. After they cut her down and found she was dead, then the cats began running wild from the doors they opened in the back-rooms of the apartment. The *gendarmes*, the short Corsican men, had their clubs in their hands and struck them down like rats. There were over a hundred cats, it was said, flying like demons at the faces of the officers, and the back-rooms foul with them. Mr. Jefferson read this in Ohio, but even then he did not believe the truth; he never for a minute saw them as a hard, grasping, sinister old pair.

Two Roads

HERE were forty-four cracked and broken paving-stones leading from the last whitewashed cottage in the village of Auchendale to the end of the pavement. It was a crazy pavement, sunk with age and worn with the restless feet of generations. When you came down the glen from over the hills, the pavement was the first part of the village that greeted your grateful feet, sending hollow echoes round the walls of the houses like a tattoo of welcome; or when departure was in your step, the narrow footway would carry you slowly and precariously over treacherous holes, drumming out its warning with sullen beats.

Weeds and moss twisted through the crazy gaps because Old Macrae, the roadman, was usually either too stiff with his rheumatism or too giddy with his whisky to bend down and pick the invaders out; and anyhow, he would mutter in excuse, it was only an old pavement that led nowhere, and what did it matter forbye?

But to young David Hervey the crazy pavement was the highway of life itself. The last forty-four broken and sunken flags of slate were a stretch of excitement that tortured his heart with palpitation and fired his mind with daring thoughts.

TWO ROADS

He had counted them so often—when first he wrestled at the village school with the units of arithmetic, and later, when vague urges within him revealed life to be a sum beyond his calculation. He had counted them, and toed them and raced over them breathlessly; for until the last one in the ragged ribbon of pavement was left behind in his young stride he was still in sight of his home and within earshot of his mother's prohibitive voice.

Then, with one jump to the right, like a deer in flight, he was cut off from view; one jump and he was beyond the high hedge and on to the worn path which cut at an angle up the green breasted hillside of Braelorach, with the tall woods at the top.

To David Hervey that stretch of ugly pavement was a way of dreams—the jumping-off point into his own wonderful realm of make-believe, from which he brought back in his fancy all the treasure his questing Argosy could find in the unknown world that lay beyond the misty horizon of his native coast. . . .

And now he was toiling breathlessly to the top. Just like a deer in flight: winded, pain in his eyes, and a great anxiety pulling down to his heavy-shod feet. The romance of it all had flown before the drum-beatings of tragedy within him.

And all for five shillings—and a great hole gaping in his pouch.

If only he had not exchanged his pen-knife with Tom Angus, the milkman's son, for the romantic-looking sailor's gully, things would have been different, he reflected in his agitation. The heavy knife with the folded splicer had rubbed and frayed and worn the lining of his pocket, and he had forgotten the hole when he ran off on an errand for his mother.

AIRD GALLOWAY

Five shillings ! Two bright half-crowns . . . a day's hard drudge for his mother, on her knees or at somebody's washing-tub.

That was a dirty trick Fate had played on him; for why couldn't it have been the two brown pennies he had run with to the baker's at dinner-time instead of five, precious-as-gold shillings ?

Something had clutched fiercely at his heart as his fingers had groped deep down and had found—nothing. Again he had thrust deeply into his pocket, and the skin of his leg had goose-fleshed at the touch of his searching fingers.

And so he had run to his lair at the hilltop.

Night was darker on the roadway between the firs than on the open path that hugged the face of Braelorach like a speckled muffler. In the glen below, lights glittered and blinked from cottage windows. And the smell of wood-smoke rose up to the clearer air on the night breeze.

The heavy blanket of silence was occasionally broken by the crack of a dried twig as a furred foot tracked the under-growth; or by the shivering squawk of a startled bird. Suddenly, a man coughed, deep-throated and awesome. A wire fence protested against a weight, and twanged queerly in the blackness.

Then the unknown night-walker broke through the bushes and stood still.

Terrified, David Hervey peered out from his bracken couch. Usually when he was afraid he would whistle, shrilly and untuneful, so long as he was making a noise; just as he did every time he had to pass the village church-yard when the shadows were low and the moving shapes around him were uncertain and uncanny.

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But to whistle now was impossible. His tongue was like a piece of dry leather.

He shrank back with widened eyes as a burst of yellow flame from a spluttering match revealed a tanned face, oddly outlined by the light as it was sucked down to a pipe bowl. A strong face; with eyebrows heavy and black. He could see knotted veins standing out on the giant hands, and snaky tattooing on the wrists. Smoke blew up and screened the features. The match died with a red glow, and the heavy footfalls stuttered again.

This was mortal terror stalking through the night; this was horror too great for his imagination—and he stifled a frightened whimper that surged to his lips from the agonised pumping of his heart.

He wanted to rise and run; but his limbs refused to move. He grasped a tuft of coarse grass and cowered back.

The moon struggled out and cast a greyness beyond the fringe of the woods. The tall stranger halted by the stile, and David Hervey saw him turn as though to cross into the fields through the knee-high bracken.

Suddenly, with three pounding steps, the figure advanced ominously in his direction and loomed above his hiding-place. A treble shriek pierced the quiet, and with an oath the giant bent down to where two eyes with the whites showing sent out their mute appeal.

“What are ye? Human or beast? . . . Eh?” a hoarse voice demanded. A tobacco-laden breath played on David Hervey’s cheek, and the smell of the sea came out of the stranger’s clothes, so pungent that kelp might have been enshrouding him.

“God save us—but it’s a boy! Or are ye some goblin hauntin’ these parts?”

AIRD GALLOWAY

There was no answer. The eyes blinked; and a small gasp rose up like a strangled prayer.

The stranger peered into David Hervey's face; then drew back with an exclamation. "What're ye doing here at this time o' night? Got no home—eh?"

A tongue clacked, a sob burst on the boy's lips.

"I—I—was maybe running away!"

"Pinched something, eh?" the man asked, with a short laugh.

David Hervey shook his head. His first terror was slowly subsiding, leaving a chill wonderment.

"I—I—well, it was some money I was wanting to make," he explained dourly.

"God save us! Even the kids—even the kids, by Jake!" And the big stranger bent his knees and seated himself heavily. "Sonny, when ye're as old as I am, them words'll turn in your stomach. Like the bile, they will, youngster. And I know!"

David Hervey cringed into the friendly shadows, still gripping the grass-tuft. The stranger's voice was kindly despite the roughness; it was heavy with a sadness and slow with a weariness that fascinated. And the smell of the sea and boats radiated friendliness.

"Like the bile!" the sailor repeated, and spat into the gloom.

"I thought I'd make a lot of money like my uncle," the boy volunteered shyly. He paused for breath and marvelled at the rugged outlines of the other's face as a shaft of moonlight sauntered over its contours. "But I wouldna' be like my uncle. I'd be sending back the money I made," he pursued with boyish candour.

"You would? Huh!"

"Aye, that's so!"

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"Maybe!"

"You see, Mrs. Maclean, her that bides next door, is for aye asking through the hedge why no money comes from my uncle, like it comes from her son in Australia every month."

The pipe snarled in its hot bowl; the stranger puffed and waited. In a moment the boy's voice continued :

"My grannie gets angry, and says that living in America isna' like living in the village, and that he has a position to be keeping. But my mother says to my grannie that her pride is making her tell the lies, and wouldn't she be better to say that my uncle's dead, because everybody knows that he never writes. Queer an' quiet he's been for twenty years, I've heard them say. As good as dead, anyway, my mother keeps declaring." There was a swift intake of breath. "And then the tears come into their eyes, and my grannie goes to bed wi' her Bible and a hot-water bottle . . . and my uncle's name isna' uttered for a long time. . . ."

His voice trailed off to a strangled nothing; and he clasped his hands across his bare knees where a network of thorn scratches pricked and burned.

Neither spoke. In the nervous silence that followed, David Hervey fidgeted with new fears his sudden access of confidence had aroused. The stranger husked in his throat; then he stared down into the heart of the glen, sitting stiffly and erectly like a figure of stone. The pipe glowed red against the rough cheek and snarled again.

A freshening breeze sighed through the bracken and brought a new chill. The boy shivered and pulled his jersey up to his ears.

"I was thinking just now that maybe it's you I've seen up here on Braelorach these two, three days past. Never coming down . . ." David Hervey ventured haltingly.

"You've got sharp eyes!" the man told him.

AIRD GALLOWAY

"Aye, that's what my grannie says. She says I see and hear more than's to my good!"

There was a sound as though a laugh had tickled the stranger's throat. But he coughed instead, and the boy jerked his head up only to see the outline of his strange companion as uncompromisingly rigid as before. He felt strangely drawn towards him by some sympathetic appeal he could never hope to explain. It was as though his small cold body was being magnetised by the other's warmth and wanted to draw closer.

"If I was to be going away it would be fine to be going with you—seeing you come off the ships!"

"Who *said* I came from the boats—eh?"

"I was just thinking!" he remarked, undaunted by the ferocity in the question.

"You're a queer knowing one, you are!" This time the man laughed, a great gurgling of mirth that shook his frame.

"You look like Malcolm Farish; him that's a skipper, and sends his mother cups and saucers from Japan that my grannie says wouldna' be holdin' much tea for a body. It is off the boats you've come?" he persisted breathlessly.

Just a grunt, and a sighing of breeze-bent branches overhead and a fresh snarling of wet tobacco.

"Well, maybe you'll be going back up the road?" David Hervey asked stubbornly, sticking to his point, saddled with an obsession to escape the retribution awaiting him at home and to go into the world, as so many others had done before him. "That would be fine. For nothing ever happens in this place. They say it's dead. Nothing ever happens at all, at all," he repeated, with all the wisdom of impatient ten years fumbling for a workable philosophy.

At last, with a deep sense of frustration, he turned away. Down in the glen the lights were winking themselves out;

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and the ribbon of river in the hollow showed up with a glister of silver here and there as the moon tumbled into the water from fissures in the cloud-banks. There was a terrifying something in the stranger's dumb fixity: a great, heavy brooding like a threatening storm.

In desperation he jerked a chilled finger in the direction of the highway that ran over Braelorach top and down to the Atlantic. "*Will you be going back up the road—again?*" he probed, frantic now. "Because—well, maybe I could be going with you!"

"No!"

The answer came like a vicious whip-crack.

"You're not going my way!" the sailor added. Then, as David Hervey shrank back at the vehemence of the retort, the stranger leaned towards him, palms pressed into the grass. "Listen," he cautioned, and his tone was kindlier, "you'd better be going back!"

"B-but—I canna!"

"You stubborn young callant—but you are!"

"No—no! Don't you see, I canna be going back? I've lost five shillings that should've been in my pouch. They'll be sore vexed wi' me. . . ."

"They'll be mighty glad to see you. Better go back before it's too late. And anyway, take it from me, it's all bunk about America being a land o' money. Isn't it from there that they are coming back instead of going? . . ."

"I—I—"

"You're only a kid, so what do you know about it, I'm wondering? Come on, I'll see you on to the path!"

"It's too late now, anyway!" the boy interposed grimly.

Only one light remained alive down there in the shadows of the green glen. His mother's light, David Hervey thought with a spasm of misgiving.

AIRD GALLOWAY

A match spluttered into flame and was held so close to his eyes that he jerked back, blinded for the moment. He was conscious of the stranger leaning towards him, peering into his freckled countenance.

“What’s your name?” the sailor demanded brusquely.

“David—David Hervey.”

“Davie!”

The diminutive was sung in a voice that was finding the native cadence. Then, slowly and soberly, with kindness slurring each word :

“You’d better be going home, Davie lad. Someday you’ll be wishin’ you had the chance—when it is too late.”

The head of tousled hair shot up in protest.

“But won’t you be understanding that I’d be back soon? They say in Auchendale that if you want to make money you’ve got to go to foreign parts. And America’s the great place for fortunes. There was Andrew Gilroy, the ploughman o’ High Kirkfield. He’s got a dairy now in America. Did you happen to see him when you were in America? Or maybe you’d be seeing Robin Michie, the smithy’s son, who works in a motor factory, or Rodger Cumming, him that stole two cows frae old Ferguson o’ Greenloaning and marketed them in Perth? The minister said that Rodger would be making a lot o’ money in America without wasting time; he said he was the lad for business deals. . . .”

“Damn you for your blethering. That road’s closed to you, if I can help it.” The ferocious repulse struck David like a blow; he cringed from the attack, his fears rising. The coarse voice trembled with passion. “The de’ils ahint your thrawnness. You’re dour like the rest. There’s some that went before you were born—twenty years back and more—and have never come home. And they said they’d make a lot o’ money. . . . And some couldn’t write because

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they'd never learned to write, and the pride in them wouldn't be letting them show another their shame in asking them to write for them . . . when they'd nothing to send. Twenty years of it—and their pride eating them inside like a canker, and the de'il taking some of them so that they'd never be coming back. Is it the tales of great fortunes that's making you a fool like they others ? ”

With terrifying suddenness a strong hand gripped David Hervey by the arm.

“ You're going down that road if I've got to carry you ! D'you hear ? God Almighty, as He's my witness, but I wish *I* had your chance,” the sailor choked with emotion.

“ But—the—the five shillings ? ” the boy muttered, near to tears.

“ What's five shillings ? A flea-bite ! ” the stranger declared with angry contempt.

“ It's a lot to my mother—she says that the scrubbing will be the death of her yet. If I could make a lot of money—but, och, you won't be understanding ! There's only my grannie's pension and the wheen shillings my mother gets frae old Simpson, the postmaster. My grannie says it's blood money. . . .”

“ Your father ? ”

“ Killed. In the War.”

There was a sudden pulsing like a great shiver where the stranger's tensed arm touched his shoulder.

“ I see ! An'—an'—tell me, Davie lad, your gran'father ? ”

“ Oh, him ? He's dead. Years back. I never knew him.”

“ He's dead ! ” The words were like a dying echo.

“ Aye ! ”

The stranger from the sea jumped to his feet with a crack of stiffened joints. He bent down and lifted the boy to his unwilling feet.

AIRD GALLOWAY

"Come on, son! You're going back before it's too late. And here's three bob to make the going easier. Heaven knows I'd be giving you more if I had it. . . . Come on!"

Hand in hand the two figures, tall and short against the blue-black skyline, took the path on the hill and trudged down the slope into the shadows.

At the bottom they struck the crazy pavement, and the staccato beats of their ill-fitting steps tattooed along the narrow streets.

For once David Hervey forgot to count the paving-stones. Somehow they had a new significance. As he hurried along, occasionally breaking into a short, panting run to keep up with the giant strides by his side, he made an amazing discovery.

He rubbed his eyes with cold fingers and stared again; it was like the thrill of becoming aware of something you had been looking at for a long time but had never seen. . . . His pavement was no longer a cracked and crazy thing leading to Braelorach and the sea beyond. It had become a straight, clean pathway, bright in the moonlight which now flooded it as though it had been washed fresh and whole in silver water. And—he had never thought of it before—but it was running in the opposite direction, right up Kirk Vennel without a break, straight to his home.

He dropped the hand he had held so desperately and tarried several paces behind. No straggling, winding ribbon with torn fringes and weeds. But a bright new silvered path—and a strange new happiness warming him within.

The stranger stopped and waited until he came up to him.

"Come on, Davie. I'll see you home," he assured him. But he could not explain his halt. These feelings of his

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were things that nobody would be understanding at all. And he ran on.

At a whitewashed cottage he stopped. Fear stirred sleepily within him as he whispered : " This is it ! "

A large hand reached out above his bare head. The door shook with a pounding knock, and the iron latch rattled from the sneck inside.

A young woman, her blouse flapping at the waist and her feet slouching in slippers, ran towards him along the short passage. She brushed the loose hair from her eyes with one hand and pulled the boy to her with the other.

" Davie, where've you been, you young torment ? " she cried, and hysteria cracked in her voice. " What happened you, Davie ? "

He buried his face into her tweed skirt, and the warmth from her stomach brought a surge of gratitude to his breast. Emotion dumbed him, and tears scalded his wind-bitten cheeks. His young arms went around her hungrily, and he leaned his whole body weariedly against the firm support of hers.

Suddenly he remembered. Gasping for breath, he pulled back and looked up with appeal.

" He—he brought me back. The stranger here ! " He pointed towards the open door.

" What's ailing you ? There's not a soul there ! "

" But I'm *telling* you, mother ! He's a sailor from foreign parts, though he speaks like us. Won't you be asking him in to bide the night wi' us ? " he pleaded. Then he wheeled round towards the doorway.

He stared and waited. No one was there.

" B-but—but, mother, he brought me back and opened the door for me ! "

" Wheesht, Davie, that's nonsense," his mother reproved,

AIRD GALLOWAY

but she was speaking as though fear tripped her words, and she was following his stare. They held on to each other and gazed at the deserted threshold.

From the room within he heard the boards of his grandmother's bed squeak; then her shrill voice protested feebly:

"Come awa' in with him, Jenny. He's been seeing ghosts!"

The wind soughed through the opening. Out in the street blackness had closed down again as the moon slid under a blanket of cloud. And feet were striding quickly, going farther and farther into the night along the crazy pavement.

STRUTHERS BURT

Entertaining the Islanders¹

The island of St. Birgitta, where the scene of this story is laid, and where the Governor, Mr. Julius Wack, David and Anita unconsciously are entertaining the islanders, appears in its most seductive colours in the following instalment, in which David's love for Anita, though it is unrecognizable by him as such, ripens in the hours they spend together.

David Banastre is the youthful head of an advertising firm in New York. Weary of the pressure of modern life, he has come wandering among the islands to find peace, to write a book, and to work out a philosophy of living that will enable him to endure life. Anita has fled from the city to St. Birgitta to escape from her husband, Gene Fulton, and from much the same social exactions that have made David weary.

They meet on the island under the benign patronage of Mr. Julius Wack. An understanding friendship grows up between them. Then suddenly Anita is recalled to New York by the sudden death of Mrs. Fulton, her husband's mother. On the night she returns to the island, she and David dine together, and that meeting, described in the following instalment, brings about a new and intense development in their intimacy.

[Earlier Instalments have appeared in our June, July and August numbers.]

DAVID stepped through one of the long windows. "They tell me Debussy has lost caste with the moderns," he said. He crossed over to the piano and leaned upon it.

¹ *Entertaining the Islanders*, by Struthers Burt. Lovat Dickson, 8s. 6d. net.

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"Aren't moderns quaint? Every ten years or so they're new moderns, being quaint."

Anita looked up and indicated a table with her head.

"The Sitwells. . . . Aren't they quaint? And T. S. Eliot, and all of them—Faulkner and the rest."

"There's your cocktail, darling—lots of them. Let's get drunk. Just you and I together, cozily. Wouldn't you like that? You always surprise me . . . you know so much for an advertising man."

David went over to the table and poured himself a drink.

"I come of a race that for generations liked books and music, and nights like this, and . . ."

Anita, playing vague melodies, looked at his intent, half-averted face, wickedly.

"And wine and women and horses," she murmured. "You're sweet! Nothing really spoils you. With the slightest encouragement you'd twine jasmine in your hair. Sometimes I wish I'd been born in Charleston."

David, grinning, turned about.

"Well—most errors can be partly rectified. I've half a mind to clean up what I can from my business, go back to 'Strawberry,' and live there as many months as possible, and write. I think I can do it. And if you'll divorce Gene, I'll take you with me. The way things are now, a small sure income—if you can hang on to it—and growing your own food, is one of the solutions."

"You're so gracious!" Anita's fingers strayed into muted jazz. "But in South Carolina there's no such thing as divorce. We'd have to live in sin."

"Then we couldn't do it. Aunt Annie wouldn't approve of it, and she lives with me."

"How much you love me!"

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Anita sighed.

"I wish I could get drunk. I never can. I get sick, and that's horrible."

"I can't get drunk either," said David. "I get incandescent, and beside myself, and sort of demoniac, and that's equally horrible. I tried once with you in New York, you know, and it didn't work."

"No, it didn't work. Well then, don't let's try. But have another cocktail. That won't ruin you."

"No, I think I can stand that."

David drank a second cocktail.

Anita stood up.

"We're going to dine out of doors. The frangipani tree is marvellous. Thanks for having it ready for me."

She led the way to the veranda and waved David to his place. Two tall candles stood in the middle of the little table and between them her face emerged, carved from the darkness, beneath an aureole made by the candlelight on her hair. She drank her soup, and when her black man had removed the pottery bowls, she leaned back, her hands folded on the cloth. Her long eyes, half veiled by their lashes, were bright with contentment.

"Well, David, here we are!"

"Yes, here we are. Like it?"

"I love it. Miss me?"

"Horribly."

"That's good. I have so much to talk to you about. But let's wait until Joseph brings in the chicken and lettuce. Pour yourself some more sherry. We've champagne coming. I like wine right on the table, or near at hand, at a party like this, don't you? And the people who wait on you as much out of the way as possible. The English custom of butlers hanging about is loathsome."

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"It comes from the time when butlers weren't supposed to be human beings."

"Exactly. Now we've given them souls the way the Turkish parliament has given souls to women. I hope this chicken is good. All the chickens down here look so strong and active and stringy."

"It is good." David leaned forward across his plate. "Joseph's gone. What was it you wanted to talk to me about? Something that's bothering you?"

"No—nothing definite. Just life in general." She looked down, twisting the stem of her champagne glass between her fingers—and suddenly she looked up. "David, people don't arrange their lives definitely enough. They don't budget them or plan them, do they?"

"Oh, agreed! . . . A thousand times!"

"They should. Barring accidents and other unexpected things, they can, more or less. That is—mature people."

"Possibly . . . but there're so many accidents. I'm trying to arrange my life more or less. That's one of the principal reasons why I'm down here. To get away from too many drinks, and too many people, and too many taxicabs."

"And I too. But perhaps we're arranging our lives wrongly."

"In what way?"

"Well, perhaps the moated grange and the ivied tower weren't meant for most people." She paused. "I don't believe they're good things, anyway. And there shouldn't be too many accidents in the relationships between men and women. Those should be susceptible to some arrangement and God knows, they're sufficiently important."

David was silent for a minute.

"Just how do you mean?"

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He felt again the small cold wind he had felt that morning in the launch.

She met his eyes obstinately, with veiled searching.

"I mean that a man can't get on without a woman, or a woman without a man. . . . No—no! Don't be foolish or stupid. Don't even attempt to smile. People always think they have to smile at a statement like that. I don't mean just physically. After all, that's a comparatively small thing. I mean in all the ways people can be to each other . . . lovely friends, helpful, thinking about each other, permeating. Life's dreadful without that. I know. . . . I've tried it. I mean in all the ways people can be to each other except, perhaps . . ." She hesitated and frowned, " . . . except, perhaps, madly in love with each other. I'm afraid of that. . . . I don't want it ever to happen to me again. It destroys for awhile both persons. Then it dies out, and there's nothing but ashes. It's a wrong start and it's not necessary."

"Are you sure of that?" David was thoughtful. "Of course, you're merely a child. You speak of yourself as a mature woman."

"Thanks—but don't be foolish. I am a mature woman. All women over twenty-five are mature, unless they are morons."

David narrowed his eyes in puzzlement.

"I wish you would be concrete. Just what do you mean? Do you mean a—a very deep friendship such as we have?"

Anita was contemptuous.

"I mean nothing of the kind. You know I don't. Much as I value our friendship, and lovely and helpful to me as it has been, I'm not such a fool as to believe that any complete relationship is possible between a man and a woman without its physical end as well. A passionate platonic friendship is an outrageous sort of thing, David. No . . . no! I don't

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mean that a simple sort of friendship like ours is outrageous, darling. That's different. . . . Don't be hurt. Never be hurt with me. Never in all my life will I hurt you intentionally. There's nobody in the world I like like you."

"A sort of old Goody Two Shoes?" suggested David sullenly.

Anita laughed.

"It's so hard to talk to men—even to you. David, darling, don't you know that you're one of the most dangerous men in the world? That's the trouble . . . you're too dangerous. I would hardly dare to contemplate falling in love with you. I don't want that sort of thing. I've told you I'm afraid of it. Why can't people love each other sensibly? They must in any sort of marriage that lasts. Married people, even the most devoted, can't all the time be victims of a grand passion. If they were, they couldn't live. They couldn't do anything else. Drink to me, David, darling. Don't look so cross. Here—touch my glass. . . . Your great happiness, David!"

"I'm not cross," said David. "I'm merely puzzled. What do you propose? What do you want? Tell me as simply as you know how."

"All right."

She lowered her eyes and studied her hands, folded once more on the table in front of her, then she looked up shyly but bravely.

"I think you're wise enough to stand it, David." Her chin was defiant. "I've been faithful to Gene just as long as there was the faintest shred of hope. Not love. . . . I fell out of that long ago. But anything. Any possible sort of life together." She shrugged her shoulders. "There's no hope. Now I intend to look quite calmly for some man who will give me at least part of what I have never had."

David brought his hand down on the table.

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"Good! You mean you'll actually divorce Gene?"

"I mean nothing of the sort. And go all through the stupid business of marriage again? Tie myself up with some man who will eventually hate me for tying him up? Not a possibility! I've got enough to do thinking about Anita so that she'll have a chance to avoid at least a few of my mistakes. No." Her voice lost its assurance and she made a gesture of uncertainty with her hands. "Of course I'm not so ingenuous as to predict the future. I may fall head over heels in love with a man at any time—I hope not; I may, as I get older, divorce Gene and marry someone for companionship. Maybe, as he gets older, even Gene will give me some companionship, but I'm beginning to doubt that. Meanwhile, why shouldn't I be independent, and busy, and rationally happy?"

"No reason in the world," said David—"if you can be."

"Thousands of people have been happy that way."

"Yes . . . but they're lucky. Anyone who is happy is lucky. I don't believe life is rational—that is, according to our notions of what rational is. I'm happy now, but that's because I am healthy and rested and interested in my work. It's no sign that something won't at any moment jump out of the corner at me."

Anita laughed.

"No, of course not. But that's no reason why you shouldn't try to arrange your life as sensibly as you can. Wise people budget their incomes, and yet—especially nowadays—no one knows if he or she will have an income for very long."

"You talk like your uncle."

"No, I don't talk like my uncle. He believes the world can arrange its outer affairs by using intelligence, but he doesn't believe people can arrange their inner affairs. He says he's too old to believe that."

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Joseph came in again with the chicken and lettuce and glacéd yams.

Anita and David talked about the Governor.

"Poor man!" said Anita. "He's so much on Uncle Julius' mind. He's like a shepherd piping on Vesuvius during an eruption."

"Un petit berger?"

"Exactly, except that he's too old for the rôle. And too moustached."

David recalled the figure of the Governor, tall, thin, golf-suited. "He's the epitome of most present-day governments," he said. "All the paraphernalia, but no idea what to do with it. Like a dead queen dressed for burial. He's vaguely troubled like everyone else, but he belongs to another dispensation. You can't teach the tory, or the conservative, or the plutocrat. In Rome, people like the Governor tried to stop the inevitable by giving the masses bread and circuses, now they try to stop the inevitable by charity and cheery advice. There're two types of mind, of course; the mind that, however unwillingly, knows when something is ended, and the mind that never admits change. As far as I'm concerned"—David was slightly rueful—"I'll agree that what we've lost was heaven for the few who were born to it; but it was hell for the majority. Now the majority want to know why it was hell, and you can't stop the inquiry. Everything else is just mere theoretical discussion. The Governor and people like him forget that even beggars and criminals are able to read."

"Are you going to his May Day picnic?" Anita asked. "It's going to be on Monday, however, because the first is Sunday. It's to be at Diabelar." She was mildly resentful. "Our beach!" She was suffused with laughter. "And the following night there's to be the final concert of the year."

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She related scandal her uncle had told her. How, the year before, the Governor had turned up at the . . .

"The Inter-Insular Councillor dinner?" suggested David.

"Yes, darling. I'm so glad champagne doesn't interfere with your pronunciation."

The Governor, it seems, had appeared in his golf suit, and, as everyone knew, the Swedes were extremely formal. Then the Governor had sat down and had clapped his hands to attract attention, and had suggested that everyone in turn tell an amusing story. "Merriment!" the Governor had said. "We'll forget the depression."

"It's incredible!" said David. "Even the Governor couldn't do that."

"But he did! Julius was there."

"I've heard the story, but I'd partly forgotten it."

Subsequently the Governor had made up a limerick or two, and finally, half through dinner, had said he had another engagement and had left the hall, skipping noticeably, according to his habit when he was insistent upon "merriment," but, at the same time, slightly embarrassed.

"Like Alice In Wonderland," Anita concluded.

"No, like any number of good earnest Americans. They're frightful when they try to play."

Joseph removed the dishes and brought in the dessert.

"You can bring the coffee, now, Joseph, and some Cointreau," said Anita. "And then we won't need you any more."

She shrugged her shoulders as Joseph went out.

"They're such queer people. You never know whether they understand you or not, but as a rule they seem to. Half the time I don't understand them. They're so much blacker—their entire make-up, I mean—than our blacks."

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"Jungle smoke and damp. You smell it, don't you?" David lit a cigarette. "The Gullahs down in our country are pretty black. Like these people, the minute you meet them, you feel another background." He reflected. "Of course, most American blacks are just apes of the white man, but not the Gullahs."

Joseph came back with the coffee and the liqueurs.

Anita poured David a cup of coffee.

"One lump, David?"

"Yes."

She sighed. "How nice to know! But I'll never remember—I never remember the amount of sugar a man takes in things. David, do you know what happened up at 'Adventure' once . . . about a hundred years ago?" Her eyes became thoughtful. "In the slave insurrection? Often at night I think about it when I'm up there. The place belonged to a great family of planters—a French family, the Turgots—and they were giving a dance, and right in the middle of it the blacks poured in. Imagine it . . . people in evening clothes, and music, and then the screaming slaves pouring in through the long windows! I believe everyone was killed but a young girl who was away at the time and two small boys who were asleep upstairs. An old nurse put them in sugar sacks and smuggled them down into St. Birgitta. Afterwards, they went to America, to an uncle or something in New York."

Her eyes grew dark.

"This island's wet with blood," she said, "isn't it? The whole world's wet with blood. That suddenly occurred to me the other day. . . . And filled with ghosts. . . . Every spot where you go. I sometimes pretend I can hear people sighing, and making love to each other, and laughing, and fighting."

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"I don't like to think about the blood," said David. His mouth was grim. "I've helped to make ghosts myself, I suppose, but I like to think about the other ghosts—the ones I didn't make. Life seems thicker and more continuous because of them. I feel the same way you do. I wonder, for instance, how many other men and women have sat right here, just as we are sitting, saying, perhaps, exactly the same things."

"I wonder. . . . Pass the cigarettes, please."

She tapped her cigarette on the tablecloth in the way women do, but men hardly at all, since women are fairly new to smoking, and so retain a ritual men have abandoned.

"Is it true that during the slave insurrection a thousand blacks were cornered on St. Hildegard and jumped from that great cliff you can see from Diabelar?"

"Yes."

She stooped to the match David struck for her.

David looked down at her small, well-brushed head and smiled reflectively. He touched the part in her hair lightly with the tip of a finger.

"I'd love to do something to make you really happy," he said.

She sat back, her eyes grateful.

"Thank you."

She leaned forward again earnestly.

"David, all things being equal, people to some extent ought to be able to order their lives."

"Yes . . . if all things are equal. They so seldom are."

"You and I are fairly free people. We ought to be able to do what we want—if we meet other people equally free."

David raised his eyelids slowly.

Inside of himself he felt an immense stillness. The only sound was his heart beating strangely.

STRUTHERS BURT

"Just what do you mean?" he asked.

He realised that from the beginning of this discussion he had been dreading . . . and hoping—perhaps . . . for some such moment. But the hope arose from vanity. Now that he was confronted with what seemed a decision, he felt that he didn't want to step over the threshold; the threshold from friendship into something else. . . . Or did he? It would be very easy to step over the threshold with Anita. Very lovely. But he did so want to keep his life clear of complications, save for the ones already in it. So often in the past he had stepped over the threshold, and he knew so well the chain of events which followed. . . . Step by step. Rote. A copy book. And damn it, he didn't want to rehearse that copy book with Anita. He liked too much his present relationship with her. And he wasn't in love with her, although he knew . . . once started . . . he would have no difficulty in thinking himself in love—at least, for a while.

"Well, David, you don't answer me."

"I've asked a question myself."

He met her eyes squarely. She held them for a moment with her own, and then a change came over her face, and her eye-lashes drooped, and she hurried on.

David's innate lack of self-assurance asserted itself. He felt that he had been on the edge of being a fool. Anita had read his look and was anxious to show him he had been wrong. She was entirely objective. He was relieved, but at the same time, he felt a trifle hurt and wistful, as men, under similar circumstances, always do. If events were only simple and direct! But then if they were . . . too simple and direct . . . they would not be events, but accidents, or catastrophes, or mere incidents. They would have little human worth.

"David, you must be in love with someone. If you're not engaged—and you're not—you must be in love in the

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way I mean.” Anita wrinkled her nose in distaste. “Love! One uses such terms. It is almost impossible to get away from them. I mean, are you intimately involved with someone and fond of her? You’re not madly in love. I know that. But are you devoted to someone?”

David reflected.

“Yes—I suppose I am. . . . When you put it that way.”

“Most unattached men are. Why shouldn’t unattached women be too? I’m glad you are. You are very sweet and attractive, and she’s lucky. And you wouldn’t think less of me if some day I did the same . . . when I found the right person?”

“Certainly I wouldn’t think the less of you.”

“And you are terribly fond of this woman . . . this girl? Really bound to her?”

“Why—I don’t suppose so really. But I’m fairly loyal. Yes, I suppose in a way I’m bound to her. Eventually, we’ll probably get married.”

“I wouldn’t, unless you have to. I’ve tried marriage.”

“What other final solution is there?”

Anita shrugged her shoulders.

“Who knows? For a while I won’t ask myself that question. Have some more champagne? It’s fun sitting over our wine this way, isn’t it? Let’s sit long. . . . David, you wouldn’t do at all.” She laughed. “Not for my purposes. Doesn’t that sound sinister? But you wouldn’t do, darling. You’re my ideal in almost every other way but that. I’m sure your nature is crescendo. As an ex-Southern gentleman I know you’d feel it your duty to pretend a really grand passion. You probably pretend a grand passion to this girl we’ve been discussing.”

David shook his head, protesting.

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"I do not. She's even more modern than you. I wish, however, that I was as sure as you that grand passions are things of the past, or, at least, that they can be turned on or off at will."

"They are things of the past."

Anita was positive.

"Romantic love didn't exist in the world until about the twelfth century. Foolish people deliberately invoke it. Tradition tells them they should. Grand passions are the opera singer's idea of love. They belong to the time of Swinburne. I want truth and starkness and real devotion. Something lucid, if it's possible. An utter lack of false or worked-up emotions. And I think that's what we're all coming to."

David laughed uncertainly.

"Once again, I wish I were as sure as you."

He lit another cigarette and looked at Anita teasingly through the smoke.

"And you've seen no man as yet that suits you?"

She was grave. She shook her head.

"No man as yet. He would have to be extraordinarily trustworthy emotionally, as well as in all other ways."

"So it would seem."

She stood up.

"Let's blow the candles out, David, and move over to the end of the porch. What a heavenly night!"

David got to his feet.

"Will you blow, David, or shall I?"

"Let's both of us blow."

"Together?"

"Yes."

"All right—count! One. . . ."

She raised her eyes. David's eyes widened. Her eyes,

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just across the candles, were like brilliant flowers. Eyes with no surroundings, no concealments.

She lowered her eyes and laughed softly.

"Our eyes are too close together, David. It's bad. People's eyes shouldn't be close together."

David's lips were dry.

"No. . . . That's bad."

"Count! One . . . two . . . three!"

For a moment there was complete darkness filled with the scent of the frangipani-tree. Then the shapes of trees and bushes, and the shapes of the uprights of the veranda stood out dark against a night that was more purple than black. And across the veranda, and a little way out into the garden, the lights from the long open windows split the darkness with gold. Below the roof of the veranda, and above the trees, were the huge soft stars.

"Are you coming, David?"

David crossed to where Anita was standing. She did not move, and it seemed to him that the darkness and some confused magic had suddenly encircled them, keeping them there, breathless and waiting. He put his hand gently on her bare shoulder. She made no movement.

"Anita!"

His arm slipped down to her waist and he drew her toward him. . . . That perilous, soft, sudden defining of a flesh so different from your own!

He spoke in a grave, spaced undertone.

"I won't love you too much."

"But enough, David?"

"Oh, yes—enough."

She laughed softly and unsteadily.

"You're so stupid! All night I've been trying to tell you."

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"What?"

"That you're the man I wanted to choose."

"I suspected that, but—I was afraid. And you don't think my Southern traditions will interfere?"

She laughed again.

"No. You haven't many left." She frowned suddenly and narrowed her eyes at him. "But this other girl? . . . Would we be hurting her?"

David smiled and shook his head from side to side.

"No, not in the least. Not one single bit. You've no idea how little she would care. . . . Come closer."

"And you . . . ? Would it be hurting you?"

"How absurd!"

Anita sighed. Her voice was small. She gestured with her hand toward the illumined drawing-room.

"I suppose not. . . . Yes. . . . Oh, David, darling! . . . David, turn out the lights."

David walked down the hill to his room. St. Birgitta was asleep except for the occasional dark tall figure of a policeman and the shadows that every now and then followed David for a while. In the harbour were the riding lights of several vessels, and the street lights of the city made a luminous semi-circle that shone at intervals through the tops of the palms. The night had become soft and black.

"It'll rain again before morning," thought David.

Women were queer. Pathetic; disturbing. They seemed so self-contained and unobtainable, until suddenly obtained. And then all they knew dropped from them and they were fumbling and clinging, child-like. Even their voices grew little and childish and wheedling, as if begging for understanding and protection.

David didn't see how a man could be very terrible to a

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woman, except when he met that fairly rare creature, a really terrible woman.

But selfish? . . . Oh, God, yes, men were selfish enough. Selfish about that one thing of obtaining a woman. After the obtaining was their time for reflection and a sense of responsibility, and—perhaps—for remorse.

Yet he—David—should have no remorse, and he hadn't any. He and Anita knew what they were doing. They were mature and thoughtful and free people. He wished, however, that men were not so fundamentally different from women in certain respects, and that women recognised more these differences. Women were remorseful before a fact; men were remorseful afterwards. Women stole with reluctance, but having stolen, were increasingly happy. Men stole passionately and gladly, and then became sorrowful.

Well, he would have to fight back from his consciousness any of that sort of nonsense where Anita was concerned. She was too fine to insult in that way. But could he help insulting her?

It was all wrong. David wondered if it was the natural man who became sorrowful after the fact, or man perverted by tradition. But the tradition, anyway, was almost as old as man himself. At all events, glory should precede, and accompany, and remain with the memory of any act, if the act itself were right.

Perhaps it was because man's one function was to set a process going, and when that was started, he was through, whereas with women, the process—at least symbolically—had only begun. Perhaps it was not until nine months later that a woman's sense of responsibility, and her reflection, and her remorse awoke.

But in any sensible plan of nature there would be mutual and increasing joy.

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Plan? That was the usual misconception. People always spoke of nature as if it had a plan. Nature merely set processes going. It was a male element. . . . But it also finished them, and, if not interfered with inevitably, and with a higher logic. There must be a plan. Yet what poor planning in the beginning to create separateness! The male element and the female element, two halves of a whole, which ever since their separation had been made even more separate by their desire to combine again perfectly. No wonder there were rough edges between the halves, since never from the first separation had the fitting been accomplished.

The male element set processes going. Perhaps, it was the female element which preserved and planned beyond the first imaginative planning.

At all events, David assured himself that he was happy. Below all troubled reflection lay that fact. No, it lay all about him and encompassed him, too. Like an aura of the mind and flesh, was the memory of something passionate and tender and lovely.

His lips felt strangely sensitive; as if they had developed a life of their own. This time there was no vague brushing of a moth's wing.

Always he had been terrifically stirred for a while by this blinding, sudden intimacy. Even with a woman whom he never saw again. This naked, quivering impact. This utter disclosure, save for a few little locked rooms of the mind. Moreover, it was as if you had abruptly taken on a new family—a mother, a father; a whole new set of relationships. But had taken them on without preparation instead of through the slow habituating of the years and time's dovetailing discoveries. There was about it all the shock of birth, of which we never hear since children cannot remember.

"It's a serious business," David said to himself. "A

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serious business! No matter what anybody says. It always has been, and it always will be. And no sane man or woman can make a jest or a lightness out of it." Nor was it the act itself that was serious—that was inconsequential, and rightly considered so. It was the giving away . . . the deep-seated contact, if only for a moment . . . of two personalities. And they must be given gravely, and with dignity, and full knowledge, or not at all.

For some reason, having thought this, David felt relieved. He came to the house of Mr. Jorgenson and ascended the broad stairs from the courtyard to the gallery.

"This is the most perfect thing that has ever happened to me," he thought. "A woman like Anita who knows just what she wants and asks nothing from me except what I can completely and honestly and without a single reservation, give."

The trade wind rustled the leaves of the palm. Save for this the courtyard was as still and as caught in the dark moment as an etching placed on a wall.

How big the winds were! They were all about. And how small man was! And yet what man did was bigger to him than the winds, although he knew the winds would still be blowing after what he had done and what he had thought were over. Or would they be over? This wind was blowing all the way up the islands. Up from Trinidad to the Virgins, and beyond . . . far beyond. What was the beginning of it, and what the ending? And what was in between?

It was the wind.

[*To be continued in the September number*]

Our Contributors

ANDRÉ MAUROIS was born in France in 1885, and was educated at the Lycée de Rouen. He was made C.B.E. and awarded the D.C.M. for his services with the British Army during the War. He is an Officer of the Legion of Honour, Hon. D.C.L. Edinburgh and Hon. Doctor of Letters, Princeton. M. Maurois is as well known in this country as in France, and most of his books have been translated and had a large public here, where he is regarded as the foremost interpreter of his time between the two countries of his adoption. His best-known books are: *Colonel Bramble, Ariel, a Shelley Romance, Byron, The Life of Disraeli*.

RUTH MANNING-SANDERS lives in Cornwall and is the wife of George Manning-Sanders, several of whose short stories have appeared in our pages. She has written a number of novels, including *Growing Trees, Hucca's Moor, Selina Pennaluna, Waste Corner and Run Away*.

LORNA REA is a Scot born in Glasgow. She was educated at Malvern and at Newnham, where she read English under Sir Arthur Quiller Couch. On leaving Cambridge she studied medicine, intending to specialise in psychology, but she gave it up after a year to marry Philip Rea, son of Walter Russell Rea, M.P., Chief Liberal Whip, and late Comptroller of the Household to H.M. The King.

Mrs. Rea started to write whilst she was at school, but it was not until 1928, when she was living for a time in Switzerland, that she completed her first novel, *Six Mrs. Greenes*, which immediately became a best seller. Since then she has published *Rachel Moon, The Happy Prisoner* and *First Night*, as well as a large number of short stories. She is an authority on the Elizabethan period, and last year wrote a brilliant study of *The Armada*.

GRAZIA DELEDDA was only fourteen when she published her first story in 1889; since then, with the exception of the war years, she has published at least one book a year. Her Sardinian stock and upbringing may account perhaps for her precocity; certainly to her childhood she owes the store of folk-lore and legend and the wealth of picturesque romantic and sombre material from which she has drawn again and again.

After her very early marriage to a member of the Italian Government she settled in Rome. In 1926 a signal honour was conferred upon her—the award of the Nobel Prize. Though the passionate exuberance of her earlier work has become gradually more subdued, she has retained her warmth of feeling and her compassionate and spiritual outlook. Her melancholy is touched with humour, her observation of men and manners acute and her descriptions extraordinarily precise and vivid, for she sees with the painter's eye. She has too the gift of suggesting far more than she actually states, so that even her slightest sketches take their place as definite episodes in our imagined world.

ROGER DATALLER is a Yorkshireman living in the coal and steel area to the south of that county. The first eight years of his working life were spent in steel-works traffic and rolling departments; the second eight years underground in a colliery. From the time-office underground he went to New College, Oxford, leaving the University three years ago. Since then he has organised for the Workers' Educational Association, and is at present a University Tutorial Class Lecturer in English Literature.

He is the author of *From a Pitman's Notebook*, *A Pitman Looks at Oxford*, *Uncouth Swain* (a novel), and *Prince of Obolo* (a play), all dealing with the social and industrial significance of the mining community. *Oxford into Coalfield*, due for publication in September, is the record of the high adventure of Adult Education among the Colliers of South Yorkshire.

He is happily married, and his main interest (apart from human beings) is the cultivation of a garden on a very windy South Yorkshire ridge.

J. E. LIVESAY has written numerous short stories for most of the leading magazines, and during the war contributed many topical stories and articles to the daily and weekly press. His first novel, *The Little Tin Gods*, was written when he was eighteen, and attracted more than the usual amount of attention earned by a first novel. Since then he has had four other novels published, and his next, *A Hound of Justice*, will appear this autumn.

KAY BOYLE was born in 1904 at St. Paul, Minnesota, U.S.A. She is married to Lawrence Vail, the American novelist and poet, and has three children. For the past twelve years she has lived in Europe. She has written two novels, *Gentleman, I Address You Privately*, and *Year Before Last*, and a volume of short stories, *Wedding Day and Other Stories*.

AIRD GALLOWAY, a native of Galloway, of farming stock, was first inspired to become an explorer—but was trained instead as a marine engineer (traditional Scottish style). A brief sea-going career came to an end upon his being offered a newspaper appointment on account of his free-lance writings. He arrived in Fleet Street almost six years ago, having graduated in reporting (crime, general and descriptive), sub-editing, news-editing and magazine production. Hobbies—People, Prose. He has now resigned from his position as assistant editor of an important national journal to devote his time to writing.

MAXWELL STRUTHERS BURT received his degree from Princeton University in 1904 and later studied at Merton College, Oxford.

He began his writing career as a reporter on the *Philadelphia Times*, and shortly afterwards removed to Princetown as an instructor in English. In 1908 he became interested in the cattle business in Wyoming, where he generally lives throughout the summer. During the World War he served in the U.S. Air Force. Of recent years he has devoted his time to writing, spending his winters in North Carolina, and his summers on his ranch. His first book, *In the High Hills*, was published in 1914, and preluded a long line of successes culminating in *Festival*, the choice of the Book Society in 1931.

His wife, Katherine Newlin Burt, is also a writer of established reputation.